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BELOW THE SURFACE.

A Story of English Country Life.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
1857.

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BELOW THE SURFACE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUNDAY DINNER-PARTY.

CLINTON having left the neighbourhood could not keep his appointment with the Eliot Prichards and the Usherwoods to hear Dr. Mullikins preach at Saltmarsh church.

Nevertheless it was resolved that the expedition should come off, and in fact on a more extensive scale than was at first contemplated. For Lady Maud, hearing that Nugent was on the Grand Jury at the Assizes, proposed that, instead of lunching between the services, the party should dine at the Manor-house after afternoon church, and drive home in the cool of the evening.

Gertrude at first opposed this, feeling it was a sort of thing that Nugent would not approve. But on her mother promising that they would be content with

a cold dinner, she gave way, and agreed to receive the company, though not without secret misgiving and uneasiness. Compromises of this kind are generally dangerous; for their value depends upon all the conditions being strictly and faithfully complied with, which is by no means an easy matter.

Saltmarsh church was an ancient structure, partly early English, partly Perpendicular. Massive columns of an early date supported the roof of the nave, but the transepts were of later character. One of these was designated the Manor-aisle, and contained the family vault of the Swampshires as well as the family pew. The latter was of considerable size, being about fifteen feet square, surrounded by a wooden partition five feet high, with a red silk curtain hung on rods running round the top. There was a neat Brussels carpet on the floor of the pew, and a variety of comfortable chairs. An old oak communion table stood in the middle, on which Prayer-books and Bibles were placed. For the late Lord Swampshire having generously presented to the church a new mahogany communion-table enriched with carvings after the manner of Gibbon consisting of pheasants, hares, and trailing festoons of convolvulus, the old oak table was no longer wanted in the chancel. There was a tidy fireplace with a register-

grate, and in short every thing was very snug and comfortable. The remainder of the church however was not precisely in what would be called good order. Huge pews of unpainted deal blocked up most of the space in the nave. Here sat large families of farmers staring at one another on opposite seats, and, in the case of the junior members, smiling or grimacing or carrying on a brisk business in the shape of exchanging lollypops for nuts or *vice versâ*. Occasionally a farmer of the old school would wake up from the repose which the high walls of the pews much facilitated, and correct some disorderly member of his family, whether male or female, by a crack over the knuckles with his oak stick or a kick on the shins, and then relapse into peaceful slumber. At a certain period of the service, that is during the recital of the creed, the sexton made up the fires in the stoves; and as this occasioned a considerable noise, a fine opportunity was afforded for an unusual consumption of nuts and apples. The coal was kept on the floor of the north transept and was very handy to get at, only the wind used to blow it rather unpleasantly about the church. Green mildew covered most of the walls in large patches, and the wind and rain found free entrance through the shattered lights of the windows. A gallery filled the further end of the

nave, and was the favourite resort of young couples who were "keeping company," and of idle boys who wished to be noisy. The choir was formed of the school children, aided by a body of amateurs who perambulated the surrounding neighbourhood from church to church, armed with violins, flutes, and bassoons. They were much devoted to the performance of elaborate passages called fugues, in which a rivulet of shrill querulous sounds is pursued by a torrent of base notes composed in equal proportions of braying and grunting, and, when overtaken, swells into a yell of hysterical anguish, appalling to unsophisticated ears.

The rector was an elderly man, aged eighty, who resided at Cheltenham for the benefit of his health. He had, in addition to his living which was worth £800 a year, a very pretty fortune of his own; and lived in much comfort, allowing his curate £100 per annum and an unfurnished house with a leaky roof. The curate could have managed pretty well, for his tastes were simple; but he had a difficulty with his schools, and ventured to ask his rector for a subscription of ten shillings per annum in addition to the pound already generously allotted for the purpose by that apostolic man. Whereupon the rector wrote back, after alluding to some trivial matters of business, as follows—

“Bless you, young man, for all your zeal in the cause of the lambs of the fold! Bless you! But let me once for all entreat you not to look to me for any additional aid whatever. You have my warm sympathy and best wishes. Go on, and prosper! But do not again ask me for assistance. It is totally, irretrievably, and morally impossible for me to comply with your request. Bless you, my good young man! And believe me, your faithful brother,

“LUCULLUS JOBSON.”

Dr. Mullikins was sojourning for his health at a sea-side watering place, not far from Saltmarsh, and undertook to preach on behalf of the local branch of the Rentworth blue-coat school at the curate's particular request.

The Manor-house Farm was about two miles from Saltmarsh church; and the excursionists from Beaumont and elsewhere began to arrive soon after luncheon at the place of rendezvous, in order to reach the church in good time.

Gertrude was rather flurried. Gatherings of this kind on the Sabbath-day had never been heard of at the Manor-house within the memory of man. It is true that Nugent, previous to starting for the assizes, had given his consent to the company having sandwiches and sherry after morning service, expecting they would then take their departure for good. Even this

concession had been made solely on account of Clinton. For Nugent cherished a vague hope that the eloquence of Mullikins might make an impression on his mind, and disturb some of his popish prejudices. Now, however, not merely was Clinton no longer one of the party, but the programme of the day's entertainment was greatly changed. There was to be a regular dinner, though of course a cold one, and Gertrude was doubtful whether Nugent would approve of it. But the plan had grown by degrees, and, having once consented to alter the arrangement, it became very difficult to draw back.

Mrs. Finchley's countenance had been growing longer and longer for the last twenty-four hours. She had according to her usual practice under trial or provocation mounted one of her largest and ugliest caps, and looked perfectly awful that Sunday as she grimly attended Gertrude into the dining-room. Here, to save the servants trouble, the bulk of the dinner was laid out early in the day, Gertrude taking her meals in a hasty way in her boudoir. Having inspected the preparations, and endeavoured to soothe Mrs. Finchley's feelings by exhibiting unusual deference of manner, Gertrude hastened to the front hall to receive her mother, who, with the Beaumont party, arrived early at

the Manor-house. Lady Maud, Jessie, and Mrs. Le Clerc—Agatha having preferred going to Okenham church—took a turn in the garden, whilst Gertrude remained to receive the Clairs and the Eliot Prichards. It was not long before the noise of wheels, the trampling of horses' feet, and ringing of bells, followed by the baying of dogs from the adjacent farm-yard, announced their arrival. A few minutes afterwards, Gertrude came hastily into the garden in quest of her mother.

"Darling!" exclaimed Lady Maud, "why, what a flutter you are in! Has Nugent returned, or what is the matter?"

"Oh, mamma, only think how tiresome! Here Sir Eliot has brought Lord Swampshire with him——"

"Well, so much the better, dear. This is an agreeable surprise."

"Yes, but he has not only brought Lord Swampshire, but Lord Swampshire's French valet who cooks for him, and they have no end of grouse and partridges in the carriage; and the Eliot Prichards say it is all done to save my servants trouble; and that Lord Swampshire is delicate and his doctors dreadfully particular about his eating! In short, they take for granted they are to do just what they like, and have the game cooked,

and seem to think it is quite a providential circumstance Lord Swampshire's deciding to join the party! What am I to do? It is most unfortunate!"

"Take the thing coolly, dearest," said Lady Maud. "It can't be helped now."

"But such an event as a hot dinner on a Sunday has never been known at the Manor-house! What will Mrs. Finchley say to it? It is distracting. And Nugent will be so much vexed when he hears of it!"

"Oh! it is easily explained; and, as for your crabbed old housekeeper, I will talk her over. Leave her to me. Put a good face on the matter. The marquis must have his hot dinner, that is clear. And it will soon be over."

"I wish it were, I am sure," answered Gertrude, as she walked slowly back to the house; "I shall have no peace till it is."

Lady Maud, true to her promise, went in search of Mrs. Finchley, and was closeted with her for full ten minutes in the housekeeper's room. What arguments she used we know not. But it is certain that, when Lady Maud emerged from that sanctum with a bundle of tracts which she had begged Mrs. Finchley to lend her, she left her in a more amiable state of mind than could have been expected; not, indeed, by any

means contented, but to some extent mollified and resigned. The valet was established in the kitchen to cook the game and toss up a side-dish or two for the invalid master, who meantime leaped gaily into the carriage, and seated himself by Lady Maud with the air of a man who was in particularly good health and spirits, as in fact he was.

Away rolled the carriages, three in number, along the drive into the village road, and up the hill towards Saltmarsh, creating immense excitement amongst all the dogs and small children that could catch a sight of them.

They were soon ensconced in the ecclesiastical sitting-room called the Swampshire family pew, where they all sat supremely uncomfortable in very comfortable chairs in various attitudes; unable, from the disposition of the furniture, to avoid staring all the time in each other's faces. The curtains were carefully drawn close, but the whole congregation rivetted their eyes upon them we are sorry to say during the greater part of the service, for the purpose of catching a glimpse of a smart bonnet or a gentleman's whisker now and then visible through the chinks of the drapery.

The curate, Mr. Hobner, a good, earnest, simple-

mindful man of the low-church school, was most painfully obsequious to Dr. Mullikins whom he regarded as one of the greatest men of the day, in consequence of his pamphlet, "Marriage a duty, and celibacy a device of Satan." For the doctor's argument had satisfied Mr. Hobner, that he might, if he chose, marry his beloved Amelia out of hand, instead of waiting until Amelia's papa had paid down the £500 promised for her dowry so soon as he retired from his clerkship at the Bank of England. Not, however, that Mr. Hobner—who was a man of sense—had the smallest intention of so doing, but it is nevertheless pleasant to feel that the road is open if we only choose to set forth. So Mr. Hobner regarded Dr. Mullikins with a feeling of mingled affection and respect. This was only a very little shaken, when, before starting for church, Dr. Mullikins with some solemnity of manner intimated he found it essential to the efficient discharge of his duty in the pulpit, to have a tumbler with an egg beat up in it waiting for him in the vestry just before the sermon. Mr. Hobner thought there would be no difficulty in this, and humbly promised that the egg should be forthwith prepared. But he was disagreeably taken aback when the doctor, in a still more solemn manner, requested, that one wine-glassful of brandy—if pale brandy so much the better—

should be mixed up with the egg, and just a drop of water added to reduce the strength. Poor Mr. Hobner being a teetotaller, partly on principle and partly from motives of economy, was dreadfully staggered at this proposition. His veneration for the doctor went down fifty per cent. Nevertheless he forced himself to carry out his wishes, and, with the assistance of a neighbouring farmer's wife, the concoction was duly prepared and placed ready in the vestry, alongside of a black bottle full of rain-water from which the curate sometimes took a hasty drink when the weather was hot, and his strength a little exhausted.

Dr. Mullikins was an extempore preacher, and a very useful thing it is to be able to preach extempore. But it is liable to abuse. There is no reason because a man has confidence and self-possession together with tolerable fluency of language, that he should get up in the pulpit, with very little or no preparation, and dash into his subject as coolly as if he were taking a salt-water bath at Brighton. We apprehend it is rather an important matter to talk to people about their souls; and, seeing you have a congregation for a limited time wholly in your power, it is worth while to do your best, and think well over your subject during the week, lest you fall into a habit of stale repetition. Or, what is

worse, trust to temporary excitement to produce something new and striking. Many a man would feel abashed and wretched if he read a correct report of his extempore discourse the morning after he had delivered it. We say then that extempore preaching, though an excellent thing, is liable to abuse. This was exemplified in the case of our friend the doctor, a worthy man in many respects, but damaged by popular applause and especially by the adulation of the lady portion of his fashionable congregation. Dr. Mullikins, in the course of a twelvemonth, was presented with as many pair of slippers as would suffice, as Sydney Smith said, "for a centipede;" little scented notes were slipped into the Bible he took up into the pulpit, asking a variety of abstruse questions which wiser men than Dr. Mullikins have confessed they could not answer, but which Dr. Mullikins never failed to solve, on the spur of the moment, with indomitable confidence; copies of verses, enclosed in silver cream-jugs, found their way down his area steps with a frequency perfectly maddening to the fat page who had charge of the plate, and saw his labours in cleaning it steadily increasing month by month; finally in all the social gatherings of his congregation, whether at snug dinner party, or

musical soirée, or theological séance, the doctor's presence produced an obsequious agitation around him, just as when a stone is flung into a placid lake, innumerable circlets dimple round the spot where it strikes the water.

When a man is exposed to an ordeal of this intoxicating description, it very often happens that he does a variety of foolish things which his calmer judgment would have heartily condemned. Thus, in the department of preaching, Dr. Mullikins, generally trusting for his matter to the inspiration of the moment, found that in order to be effective he must rouse himself to a state of excitement; and this process being sometimes no very easy matter, he was obliged to have recourse to artificial stimulants to quicken the pulsations of his heart, and set the machine as it were in motion. He generally managed, thanks to this fillip to his system, to work himself up to the mark, however fatigued or depressed he might feel. Then another evil occurred. Thoughts began to flash through his mind rapidly enough, but they were often queer eccentric notions, which had they occurred to him in the quiet of his study he would have blown out of his way as mere troublesome dust. Familiar expressions, grotesque epithets, irreverent handling of scripture

truths or scripture facts ; such were some of the objectionable features of Dr. Mullikins' extempore addresses. Even his most ardent admirers opened their eyes rather wide at his occasional indiscretions in the pulpit.

On the present occasion Dr. Mullikins took up the subject of Jael and Sisera. His object was in the first place to prove that Jael's conduct was not only justifiable but praiseworthy ; and in the second place by an easy application to show how manifestly it was the duty of the sincere protestant to exterminate popish error, without reference to the temporary suffering and annoyance we may thereby inflict upon its victims : and notwithstanding they may have evinced a touching confidence by yielding every attention to our arguments, and placing themselves trustingly in our hands.

The first part of the sermon was a little impaired by the doctor's painting so vigorously the difficulties we feel in applauding Jael's conduct, that he fatally prepossessed his hearers' minds against the position he meant to establish, namely, that Jael was right. The doctor had destroyed easily enough and in his best style, but it was a harder matter to build up. This is not an uncommon mistake of a popular preacher ; to startle his audience by urging, with profound emphasis, every thing latitudinarians or sceptics can advance against some

theory he himself holds, and, having created no little excitement, then attempt to undo all he has been arduously weaving together. But this is, as we have shown, a dangerous thing for an extempore preacher to try his hand at. The doctor laboured to remove the unfortunate impression left by the first part of his sermon without much success, and then passed to the application of his text, the duty of crushing religious error wherever or whenever discovered, "by stern force of faithful denunciation, or by the gentle and even stealthy influence of indirect insinuation." Here, however, the fervour of his remarks was unfortunately a little thrown away in consequence of Clinton's absence. The doctor had had a hint that a papist of rank and title was to be in Lord Swampshire's pew. Hence the topic and line of argument adopted.

The mass of the congregation sat with open mouths and eyes, not comprehending two consecutive sentences which fell from his lips. The fashionables in the family pew began to behave rather indecorously. Sir Eliot Prichard *would* drop off to sleep, and suddenly wake up again with a violent nod. Whereupon he would immediately repeat the nod in a milder form, as if he had perpetrated the first on purpose and rather liked doing so when he felt unusually wakeful. Then Jessie, Miss Eliot Prichard, Lord

Swampshire, and even Mr. Edgar Clair, who like most shy men always laughed most when he ought not to have laughed at all, fell into agonies of suppressed amusement. Colonel Clair took snuff, and tried to look as if he understood the sermon. Lady Maud and Mrs. Le Clerc passed the time in exchanging fans and smelling-bottles.

Meantime poor Mr. Hobner began to get into a frightful state of mind. It was a charity sermon, as we have said, on behalf of the local branch of the Rentworth Blue Coat School. There sat twenty small boys, in the hideous and oppressive livery peculiar to such foundations, on a bench right in front of the pulpit, ready to wake up and burst into a hymn appropriate to the occasion as soon as the doctor had finished his oratorical exertions on their behalf. Yet the doctor had never once alluded to the subject, and was floundering in a whirlpool of metaphorical incoherence, endeavouring to get out of it as soon as possible and bring his sermon to an end. Moments were precious. Mr. Hobner was in a cold perspiration. The interests of the Blue Coat School were in jeopardy. As for sending up a note by way of reminder or any thing of that kind, he would have as soon thought of interrupting an archbishop in the delivery of a charge by presenting him with a Manilla cheroot. He was utterly discomfited. Meantime, how-

ever, another person was not unobservant of the doctor's omission to touch upon the claims of the charity-boys. This was the senior churchwarden, a large, fine-looking old man, with white hair and an honest countenance, a perfect picture of the oldfashioned class of yeomen. The senior churchwarden had to hold the plate at the door, and, being a man of strong sense, did not much relish standing at the door like a stray beggar, nobody knowing for what purpose he solicited contributions. So, after evincing immense impatience for a considerable time; making signs to the curate; winking with an air of great inward suffering at the clerk; groaning audibly; giving his whole body a shake which made half the pews in the vicinity creak again—the senior churchwarden on a sudden rose, and determined to set things to rights after his own fashion. He would give the doctor's memory a jog come what may. So, producing the silver salver he was about to hold at the door, he emphatically dropped into it one shilling's worth of halfpence, and then, deliberately opening the pew door, marched slowly down the middle aisle, making the halfpence, at each step he took, perform a stately but somewhat noisy minuet on the silver salver in his hand. At first sight of this proceeding, and hearing the measured rattle of the halfpence, Dr. Mullikins, who was half out of his metaphorical whirlpool, with one

foot on shore and one at sea, was not a little agitated. He thought it was the benighted papist whom he supposed he was addressing, advancing towards him in a frenzy of religious animosity, about to pelt him with pebbles artfully provided beforehand at the neighbouring beach. The next moment, however, he detected what the churchwarden was carrying. Then, like a flash of lightning, the thought, "This was to be a charity sermon!" burst upon him. Ay, but what for? He only dimly remembered something about a charity school. Now, the doctor was very shortsighted, and, gazing wildly round the church, whom should he catch sight of but the twenty blue-coat boys sitting opposite the pulpit, with their long cloth petticoats hanging about their legs.

"Aha!" cried the doctor; "to be sure! How sharp I am! A sermon on behalf of a girls' charity school. All right!" and away went the doctor, having little time to lose, urging the duty of the rich to succour the children of the deserving poor. "And especially, dear brethren, the female children. These deserve at our hands the kindest, tenderest, and, if I may so say, the most parental sympathies. Boys may and must rough it. But the heart sickens at the thought of gentle maidens, such as those I see before me, tossed upon the waves of a friendless world, exposed to the

snare and sufferings, the pains and penalties, which poison and torture all the cellular tissues of modern society. Let not these things be, my brethren! Teach these little ones to sew and knit, to bake and brew—ay, to cook and to nurse! Teach them to earn their bread as honest, modest, decent young women, in whatever station of life they may be placed.”

The family pew was all this time in a state of distracting merriment behind the red silk curtains. The congregation began to whisper and stare. The countenances of the twenty charity boys gradually expanded into a silent grin of wondering enjoyment. But the doctor, after some allusions to the religious department of education, now brought his observations to an end, and retired to the vestry-room, followed by Hobner in a state of acute embarrassment. He dared not tell the doctor of his error, and yet did not like his congregation to be set down in the doctor's mind as “the most irreverent and profane he had ever had the misfortune to address.” These were the precise words in which Dr. Mullikins gave vent to his feelings on finding himself *tête-à-tête* with the curate, over a mutton-chop and a bottle of indifferent wine, at the vicarage with the leaky roof, on the evening of the misadventure we have just related. The poor curate was, however, consoled by the

receipts at the door, which exceeded by some pounds—thanks to the family pew being filled—the usual amount collected on such occasions. Moreover, his heart was cheered by hearing the marquis tell the churchwarden, as he slipped two or three sovereigns into the plate, that really something must be done about repairing the windows and stopping the leaks; and that, if the parish would do their part by the body of the church, he would do his part by the chancel. An announcement which excited some hope in the curate's mind of escaping from his periodical attack of rheumatism next Christmas, as the parish had hitherto steadily refused a church-rate to repair the nave, on the plea that the chancel ought to be repaired at the same time. This as yet could scarcely happen; for the marquis's agent, who only came down twice a-year to collect the rents, invariably pooh-poohed the idea, and nobody ventured to apply direct to his employer.

In about half an hour after the conclusion of the service at Saltmarsh church, the party at the Manor-house Farm were all seated round the dining-room table, discussing with much hilarity the events of the day, as well as the partly cold and partly hot collation spread before them. They had got half-way through dinner, when the coachman, who acted in

the capacity of indoor servant, came up to Gertrude and whispered the disagreeable intelligence that the wine was nearly all consumed, and that Mr. Edward Harrill, who had charge of the cellar, had walked out with the key in his pocket.

"What a stupid lad! Did not you tell him more wine would be wanted?" whispered Gertrude.

"So I did, marm—so I did! It's all his mischeevousness, marm."

"Sir Eliot, a glass of wine?" asked the marquis.

"With pleasure, my lord."

"Some more sherry, my dear Gertrude!" gently insinuated Lady Maud from the other end of the table, and added by way of explanation; "It is a little awkward—Nugent being away——"

"Oh, never mind the sherry!" exclaimed the marquis; "port will do." And he helped himself to the remaining glass in the bottle, in happy ignorance that it was the last in the house. "I enjoy amazingly," said he, "this kind of Sunday pic-nic!"

Gertrude took a desperate resolution. She summoned the coachman again.

"John, go and tell Lucy to run as fast as she can to the rectory, and beg Mr. Lovell, with my compliments, to lend me a bottle of port and a bottle of sherry. Say

there is company, and we cannot find the key of the cellar. Pray, be as quick as you can."

The coachman bustled away, and gave his message to Lucy, who, in a few minutes, was seen tripping across the park with a basket on her arm in the direction of the rectory. She had just reached the small wicket-gate leading into the rectory garden, when a hand was placed more firmly than was pleasant on her wrist, and a voice said rather angrily—

"Now, where are you going, Miss Lucy, and what are you up to?"

She turned hastily, and found Edward Harrill by her side—a frown on his forehead, and his eyes kindling with anger.

"And pray, Mr. Edward, what business is it of yours, I should like to know?"

"You shall not move till you tell me, that's all I know," answered he, sullenly.

Now, Lucy's spirit, for one or two reasons, had been a good deal quelled of late, but chiefly on account of getting no tidings whatever of her brother—a trial the more painful to her, because, in accordance with his strict injunctions, she did not venture to divulge her anxiety, but suffered in secret.

So, instead of making any reply, she had recourse

to a favourite feminine expedient, and burst into tears.

“Why don’t you tell me, then?” said Edward, who was immediately softened at the sight of tears.

“I am going a message for mistress,” sobbed Lucy.

“Well, but what is the basket for?”

“To put the wine in, to be sure,” replied Lucy. “But, now I have seen you, it may not be wanted. Here, all the dinner’s at a stand-still for want of wine! Pray, run home and open the cellar.”

“They shall not have a drop!” answered Edward, vehemently—“not a drop! It’s a wicked proceeding altogether. Mr. Nugent hates Sunday dinner-parties. I have heard him say so.”

“But Mrs. Nugent may do as she likes in his absence, I presume, without asking your leave, Mr. Edward?”

“I shall stand by Mr. Nugent,” was Edward’s reply.

“Well, then,” continued Lucy, “I must make haste and carry my message to Mr. Lovell.”

“Go back!” said Edward, raising his voice—“You shall not get any more wine! I will not allow it!”

Lucy, crying with vexation and anger, endeavoured to pass, but Edward forcibly held the gate closed. But at this juncture a third person appeared on the scene, namely, Lovell, who, from the windows of the rectory,

had been watching with some perplexity what was going on.

“Why, Edward, what are you about? What is the matter, Lucy? Quarrelling in the public road, and on Sunday evening, too! For shame!”

They both looked abashed, but Lucy was the first to speak; and, before Edward had time to decide whether he should lay the whole case before Lovell or not, the latter had disappeared in the house, and emerged with a couple of bottles under his arm, which he deposited in Lucy’s basket, and then sent her home again as fast as she could get over the ground.

Edward looked wistfully after her, and was about to start in pursuit, but Lovell stopped him.

“Come in with me, Edward, and let’s have a little talk together.”

Meantime the ladies at the Manor-house had retired from the dining-room, and the gentlemen were growing impatient for the wine which it was rumoured had been sent for. However, it arrived at last. But, before they had drank more than a glass or two, another interruption to their festivity occurred, that we must now proceed to narrate.

“Come, Edgar!” exclaimed Sir Eliot, who had been telling a good story. “Come, Edgar, when you have

done laughing, pass the wine, and make haste about it!"

"Not bad port!" observed Lord Swampshire.

"No; but seems to have been well shaken in Nugent's winnowing machine," said Colonel Clair.

"It's a decent kind of rubicund mud," rejoined Sir Eliot. "Better than that portable essence of cholera, in the shape of cider, which the wicked old coachman wanted us to take after our cheese."

"You're mistaken, Eliot!" exclaimed Swampshire; "you libel our county. Cholera makes no progress where cider is the common drink."

"That's because the cider has left no survivors."

"What beautiful women there are in this county!" exclaimed Edgar Clair, whose shyness was wearing off.

There was a gentlemanly shout of laughter round the table.

"Who d'ye mean, Edgar—Mrs. Finchley?"

"Pooh! Look at the Misses Usherwood!"

"Neither of them equal to Mrs. Nugent, in my opinion," said Colonel Clair, filling his glass.

"Mr. Edgar Clair, I wish you success!" said Lord Swampshire, good-humouredly.

Then came a little more jesting, and Edgar Clair's health was drunk amidst renewed laughter.

"I say," suddenly exclaimed Colonel Clair, "who is that staring through the window?"

"Looked uncommonly like Nugent," observed Sir Eliot.

"He is a very good fellow," said Lord Swampshire. "I shall be glad to see him."

"Whoever it was, he's gone now," said Clair."

"Well, shall we join the ladies?" suggested the marquis.

And the men rose and sauntered out of the room.

Meantime Nugent, for Sir Eliot had rightly guessed whose face it was that for a minute had been gazing into the dining-room, made his way, as was his wont when returning home later than usual, into the house by the back entrance, having first taken his horse round to the stable himself.

It was, as we have intimated, a rambling, old-fashioned house, and the back passage led by the kitchen offices. Outside the kitchen, on an oak table, were piled the plates and dishes used during the recent repast. A cur dog belonging to Miss Eliot Prichard, which she fondly imagined was a genuine Skye terrier, was greedily devouring the carcase of a half-eaten grouse. In the kitchen, the footman and coachman, who had accompanied the party, were in loud talk over a rather savoury

meal, tossed up by the French valet. Mrs. Finchley had retired from the scene with indignation, and left the field entirely free.

Nugent stood for a moment almost petrified with astonishment.

To understand his feelings, we must bear in mind that such a thing as a regular Sunday dinner-party had never been known at the Manor-house for the last two hundred years at the least. Regularly as the week came round, from childhood upwards, had Nugent been accustomed to a cold dinner of a simple description, generally combined with an early tea. So much a matter of course had this become, that, apart from religious reasons, any change would have seemed to Nugent like a reflection on his ancestors—a wanton and sacrilegious innovation. It was, therefore, certainly rather startling to come home and find in the dining-room a party of gentlemen in full chorus of laughter over desert and wine, and in the kitchen offices the relics apparently of a company dinner, and a group of strange servants turning the kitchen upside down, and revelling in a regular hot supper.

But what had brought Nugent home thus suddenly? In the first place, the grand jury was dismissed late the night before. This, however, would not have induced

Nugent to travel home on a Sunday, even so short a distance as thirty miles. There was another reason. He had received a strange note from Edward to the following effect :—

“OKENHAM, SATURDAY EVENING.

“DEAR SIR,

“I hope I am not doing wrong, but I do not like what is going on here, and I can’t rest till I let you know it, though you may think me meddlesome, which I fear I shall always be when your wishes are concerned ; and I heartily hope you will be back to-morrow in time to stop it all. And beg to remain, as always, your grateful and obedient servant,

“EDWARD HARRILL.”

A year ago Nugent might have laughed at this letter. Now the case was different. There was a kind of under-current of uneasiness always running through his thoughts, and especially when away from home. A trifle would sometimes set him off thinking, until he tormented himself with a hundred morbid fancies. So, when the afternoon service was over, he mounted “Rocket,” and was at Okenham in a matter of four hours.

Hastening up-stairs before the gentlemen had left the

dining-room, Nugent directed his steps towards Gertrude's boudoir, hoping by chance to find her there. He stopped, however, at the door, for he heard merry voices inside.

"So, this is your celebrated boudoir, is it, Mrs. Nugent?" exclaimed Miss Eliot Prichard. "What a delightful place for a flirtation! But I wish it was on the ground floor. I am such a lazy girl" (she was forty-two last birthday) "that I don't like climbing stairs."

"There seem a good many dissenting books up yonder," languidly observed Mrs. Le Clerc, who was by way of being rather high church.

"And who's that hideous creature squinting at a goose-quill pen?" exclaimed Jessie, pointing to the portrait of Sarah Matilda.

"A very pretty room," remarked Lady Maud, sinking into an easy-chair; "a very pretty room. Nugent has done his best, poor fellow! He meant to be kind. They sha'n't find fault—shall they Gertrude, darling?"

Meantime Miss Eliot Prichard made a dash at the piano, and commenced playing a waltz.

Gertrude exclaimed—"My dear, it's Sunday!"

"Oh dear—I forgot! Well, then, here goes for a mass!" And she dashed into Mozart.

"What spirits she has!" observed Mrs. Le Clerc, passing her vinaigrette once or twice under her nose.

Nugent listened no longer, but passed into his dressing-room. Here, seizing a scrap of note-paper, he wrote a few lines to Gertrude, and, ringing his bell, gave the note to Lucy to take it to her mistress.

Lucy hastened into the drawing-room, where all the company were sipping coffee preliminary to their drive home.

"Uncommon pretty girl!" remarked Mr. Edgar Clair to Sir Eliot. "But, how deadly pale!"

"Pale? Just look at Mrs. Nugent. She's pale, if you like! And what are they all whispering about? Come, I shall be off. There seems a bit of a storm brewing. Go and get the horses put to; there's a good fellow."

Lord Swampshire was just advancing to Mrs. Nugent to express a hope that they were right in surmising that Nugent had returned, when Lucy forestalled him by presenting the note to her. She read it, changed colour, and flung it into her mother's lap.

It was as follows:—

"DEAR GERTRUDE,

"I am come home tired, and do not feel up to company. In fact, I am not well. Make my excuse, and pray

explain to me *to-morrow morning* what all this means.—
Affectionately yours,

“O. N.”

For, thought Nugent, I am just now excited, and it will be best for me to sleep over the matter before discussing it. I cannot trust myself at this moment, and may say something I shall afterwards regret.

Lady Maud whispered to Gertrude—

“Lay all the blame on me, dearest. It will soon blow over. Don’t look so terribly *abimée*. Occupy yourself in getting those people away. I will help you.” Thus saying, Lady Maud glided into the group collected in the middle of the room, and, by anxiety about her own carriage, accelerated the preparations for departure.

“Nugent,” she said to two or three—“Nugent has come home quite knocked up. Head aches terribly. Very sorry, but obliged to go to bed. Jessie, dear, ring the bell; be sure they understand about the carriage. It is getting quite dark, and we have no lamps.”

As soon as all except Lady Maud and Jessie were gone, Gertrude hastily approached her mother, and said—

“I shall now go and explain every thing. I am not surprised he is vexed. Good-night, dear mother.”

Lady Maud laid her soft hand on Gertrude’s wrist.

“Love, don’t be foolish! Let him sleep over it. To-night he is tired and angry. Let him sleep it off.” Gertrude hesitated.

“A few words only would suffice, dear mamma—a very few words. Had not I better go at once, and set all straight?”

“Send your maid, dear, with a nice little tray of sandwiches and hot negus, and your kind love. Don’t rush into any discussions to-night. Sufficient for the day—you know the rest.”

Gertrude yielded, but reluctantly. Instinct told her to go to him at all hazards. Her mother’s reasoning restrained her. Which was in the right? The reader must judge. One thing Gertrude noticed as she went up-stairs, vexed and anxious, namely, that the tray of sandwiches and the hot negus stood untasted on the slab outside Nugent’s door. He had said he wanted nothing, and begged not to be disturbed as he was going directly to bed.

CHAPTER II.

NUGENT'S REVENGE.

NUGENT rose the next morning soon after daybreak, and, summoning Edward, rode with him to two or three outlying portions of his farm. Soon the early mist began to clear, creeping up the hill-sides like wreaths of heavy smoke; whilst the sun, emerging from the grey bank of clouds that intercepted its light and heat, rose higher and higher in the heavens, and shed a broad flood of lustre over the valley, bringing out the lights and shadows of the thick woods which skirted the base of the hills, and turning the dusky rivulet that wound down their southern slope into a band of silver light. Then Nugent turned his horse's head, not towards home, but towards Lovell's rectory, and at the same time uttered almost the first words he had spoken to Edward that day.

“Edward, you may go home. Let Mrs. Nugent know that I intend to breakfast at the rectory, but shall be home by eleven o'clock.”

Edward paused a moment, and then said as if with an effort,—

“I hope I did not do wrong in writing to you?”

“Well, Edward,” answered Nugent after a moment’s embarrassment, “your intentions were good, and I thank you.”

So saying, he took the lad’s hand and pressed it affectionately. The boy looked at Nugent with a brightening countenance, then, shaking his pony’s reins, cantered off towards home. These two managed to communicate their ideas one to another with very few words. Sometimes for hours they would ride, walk, or stand still, watching the men at work, and scarce say a word all the time. At other times they would converse pretty fluently, but often, as we have said, would be silent, and that without any wish on either side to talk for mere talking’s sake. Nugent, having flung his horse’s bridle over the wicket gate-post, walked up the gravel walk leading to the rectory. As he approached the door, a strong smell of burning arrested his attention. It seemed to come from the back of the house, and he therefore stepped quietly round to see if any thing was amiss. As soon as he turned the corner, a somewhat mysterious spectacle presented itself. In the centre of a small terrace-walk at the back of the rectory, was a

large heap, apparently of books and papers, in full blaze, whilst Lovell, in his grey loose overcoat, stood beside it, armed with a long-handled garden rake with which every now and then he vigorously stirred up the bonfire, until the smoke and flames compelled him to retreat a few paces for his own security.

"Halloo—Lovell!" exclaimed Nugent, "What's on foot now?"

Lovell hastily flung down the rake, and, advancing to Nugent with a countenance expressive of the deepest agitation, exclaimed—

"Haven't you heard? Smithers is gone!"

"Gone! where?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, to Rome, to be sure! Went last week. It's a sad thing!"

"What!" exclaimed Nugent, himself getting rather excited. "Do you mean he has joined the church of Rome?"

"It's too true—too true! I have it under his own hand and seal. Smithers is gone!"

"Where will it end?" asked Nugent gloomily, as if addressing himself.

"See here!" said Lovell, recovering almost of a sudden his natural tone of voice. "It's really rather cool of him. Here have we, for three years, been constantly

meeting, and discussing the controverted points of doctrine between our church and the church of Rome; he always maintaining that we were all right, and that the church of England was a true branch of the church catholic, whilst Romanists were nothing but dissenters in this country. When all of a sudden he writes to me, and takes quite a high tone; warns me seriously of my unhappy vacillation of mind; urges me no longer to halt between two opinions; intimates broadly that I am privately and at heart an abandoned infidel with a few redeeming amiabilities of disposition; and counsels me, in a condescending sort of way, to throw myself into the arms of my true spiritual mother, the church of Rome! And then, to add insult to injury, he winds up with a quotation from one of the fathers, which he always used to hold was not genuine! It is really rather too bad!"

And Lovell made a rush at the bonfire, and once more set it off crackling in a ruddy blaze.

"Well, but what are you burning?"

"Why, to tell the truth," rejoined Lovell, again returning from the bonfire,—“I am burning a lot of semi-Romanist books and periodicals I had by me. Lives of the saints, translations of Romish devotional books, an adaptation of the litany of the blessed Virgin

for the use of members of the English communion, and a lot of other things which I want to put out of my way at once, and for ever."

"Right!" commented Nugent—"perfectly right!"

"Mind, I don't say," continued Lovell, "that other men might not have these things by them, and read them, or at least some of them, with advantage. It is possible. But I am going to take Smithers' advice in one respect. I am not going to halt between two opinions. And so I have done with these half-and-half productions. I find, if I follow the road Smithers and his set were taking me, I must logically end in Rome. There is no help for it. Now, there are some things in the church of Rome which I heartily abominate, and therefore I prefer staying where I am."

Nugent pressed his hand, and said—

"I wish you would run your eye over the 'Whispers of the Zodiac,' Dr. Going's last; I think it would be a comfort."

"I don't know that," added Lovell. "Though my Romanism may be exploded, I am not, for all that, likely to collapse into a puritan. But allow me to ask, Nugent, what gives me the pleasure of your company so early?"

"Why, first of all, I am come to ask for a breakfast;

and then, secondly, I want to have a talk with you."

"Come along, then! Breakfast is just ready." And they entered the house arm in arm.

The conversation at breakfast chiefly turned upon Smithers' defection, and the likelihood of others following his example. At last, Nugent rather abruptly exclaimed—

"In the course of a few weeks, Lovell, I am going to London. Can I do any [thing for you there?"

"Well, my dear fellow, I will let you know in good time; but a few weeks is rather a long notice. What stay do you make?"

"That depends. But it is not merely a day or two's visit. I purpose taking a house for two or three months, and am not sure whether we shall return here afterwards. Possibly, we shall settle elsewhere for a year or two."

Lovell seemed surprised.

"What, leave the neighbourhood for good? Give up your house? your farm? How shall we get on without you?"

"I trust we shall come back eventually. There are reasons for our leaving which I cannot well explain. I

trust, with the blessing of heaven, we may return here after a while. But go we must."

Nugent spoke with some slight agitation of manner, but his mind was plainly made up. Lovell knew his reserved disposition, and the scrupulous care with which he avoided confiding to others, without express authority, any matters in which the interests of those connected with him were involved. Nor was Lovell a man to attempt to worm out the secrets of a friend. But he had not for nearly two years associated with the Nugents as a friend and as the clergyman of their parish, without forming some notion of the state of things at the Manor-house Farm. He was conscious that the Nugents were not as happy as they ought to be. The very incident which had come to his knowledge last night; the Sunday dinner-party apparently got up in defiance of Nugent's deliberate wish and invariable custom; and again, Edward's excitement on the subject, plainly proved that there was something wrong in their relations as man and wife. He reflected for a moment, and presently replied—

"I have no doubt that you have good reasons for taking this step. I think very often a change of the kind must be very salutary for mind and body. It is true, Mrs. Nugent will be further off from her mother."

"So much the better!" interposed Nugent with a degree of outspoken energy not very usual in him.

Lovell could not help smiling, but went on.

"To tell the honest truth, Nugent, I am much of your mind. Not that I wish to run down Lady Maud behind her back. But she is so awfully fond of managing, and interfering, and finessing, that I confess I should rather dread to be constantly within range of her influence."

"Always up to some mischief or other!" ejaculated Nugent.

"She means well, I do believe," interposed Lovell.

"But her motives are low and worldly," persisted Nugent.

"Kind-hearted in the main," persisted the other.

"A Jesuit, Lovell—a Jesuit! An unmitigated Jesuit!" And Nugent, in his excitement, took two or three turns up and down the room. Then sat down abruptly, looking very much ashamed of himself.

Lovell with a smile went on—

"She has grave faults, no doubt. And the marvel to me is, how her three daughters, brought up as they were under her influence, should be the dear good girls they are; though I ought to ask pardon for speaking in so familiar a strain. The old father is a simple-minded,

honest sort of man, and they have had a well-principled governess. I attribute much to that."

Nugent, now once more grave and composed, and desirous of showing that he was so, observed, as he sedately drank off the remainder of his coffee—

"You're a good fellow, Lovell, for you have a kind word for every body!"

"I was going to add, when you interrupted me just now, that, apart from Lady Maud's personal character and peculiarities, I don't think it is any advantage for married daughters to be settled near their parents. As a general rule, husband and wife are more likely to get on better—to settle down and understand each other's characters, and become truly and tenderly *one*—when left entirely to themselves, than when pitied, and consoled, and cautioned, and advised, and affectionately pestered, by sympathizing friends and relatives. If they disagree, let them fight it out in private. 'Tis the best chance of concord, after all!"

Nugent said nothing, but Lovell noticed his face glow with satisfaction as he listened to what he was saying.

"A new scene," continued Lovell, "will be a pleasant change for Mrs. Nugent. She has rarely left this neighbourhood."

"What I wished to say to you," Nugent now began, "related to Edward. I am a little puzzled what to do with him. I don't want to take him with me."

"Will he stay behind?" asked Lovell with a smile.

"Not at the Manor-house. But I was going to propose a plan."

"Well, let us hear it."

"Will you take charge of him, and I will pay for his board, and as much more as you may think right?"

Lovell pondered for a second or two.

"I don't mind for a short time—say for two or three months. But not for any indefinite period. I like the lad. He is generous, affectionate, and anxious to please. But he has a strong will of his own, and a fiery temper when roused. The responsibility would be rather serious."

"Try him for three months. You will do him good, and confer a real obligation on me."

So the thing was settled. Lovell would only accept a small allowance for his board; and it was agreed that, if he went on well, and Lovell did not find it inconvenient, he might remain for a longer time than the three months specified.

Nugent then took leave, anxious, now that this

difficulty was removed out of his path, to lose no time in divulging his intentions to Gertrude. Lovell, who had to visit some cottages belonging to the coast-guard men on the seashore at the back of the Manor-house hill, accompanied him on foot part of the way, and then turned up a lane leading to the hill. Nugent, as the reader will remember, had sent word to Gertrude that he should be home again at eleven o'clock. But finding that Colonel Clair, who was to meet him at ten about purchasing some Southdowns, had not kept his appointment, he went straight home, and found that Gertrude also had gone out, leaving word she would be back punctually at eleven.

The fact was, that she was in a state of excitement which prevented her remaining still, and it was a relief to get into the fresh air, and, climbing the hill behind the Manor-house, have a good long look at the blue sea trembling in the sunshine, and traversed by a white sail or two in the far off distance. She was, however, directing her steps homeward about the time of Nugent's return, when she was met at the brow of the hill by Lovell. They were always good friends; but, on the present occasion, Lovell noticed that Gertrude's hand lingered for a moment in his own, whilst tears came into her eyes. He felt for her, but only showed

his sympathy by somewhat more gentleness of manner than usual.

“So you are going to leave us?” remarked Lovell, in order to break the silence.

Gertrude started, and looked up at him with undisguised amazement. The latter upbraided himself secretly for his stupidity. She evidently knew nothing about it.

“Going—going to leave you?”

“I heard—I thought—Nugent and you were going somewhere for a change!” answered Lovell with some confusion. Then, in order to change the subject, dashed off into something else.

“You have been so kind to me, Mrs. Nugent, about—about your sister—that I think I must venture to tell you what occurred Saturday——”

Gertrude was not in the best frame of mind for listening to confidences of this kind, but she was good-natured, and, what is perhaps more to the purpose, possessed a good share of that sympathy with people in love, so characteristic of young women in general. Moreover, she liked Lovell, and knew that Agatha was very much attached to him. So she collected her scattered thoughts, and turned her tearful eyes towards

Lovell with an expression of kindness and good-will, saying—

“Have you really spoken to mamma?”

Lovell, colouring as he always did when the subject was even remotely hinted at, went on—“Yes, Mrs. Nugent, I really have! Of course, it was an effort. But one thing I knew, that Lady Maud would deal gently with me, and put me out of pain without unnecessary cruelty.”

“Tell me all about it, pray!” exclaimed Gertrude, beginning to be really interested. “It was rather sudden, was it not?”

“Why, you see, Mrs. Nugent, I thought it was wrong to go on, meeting Agatha, talking with her, and getting more desperately attached to her every week, and perhaps—who knows?—making her——”

“What?”

“Making her—like me a little—I hope ’tis not presumptuous to say so!” said Lovell, with a deprecating look at Gertrude, and colouring more and more.

“Mr. Lovell, you need not be so humble. I am confident she is much attached to you——”

“You don’t say so?” exclaimed Lovell, his eye kindling with delight. “She is the best and sweetest

creature that ever lived. So thoughtful of others, so kind and patient, and so very beautiful!"

"True," said Gertrude, "but please go on with your interview with mamma—I am longing to hear!"

"Well, I thought I ought to lay the case openly and honestly before her."

"And did she disapprove?"

"Not exactly. But she didn't approve."

"How do you mean?"

"Lady Maud considers Agatha too young, being only eighteen, to know her own mind, and, perhaps, that's true enough. So she says the matter must stand over for a year or two."

"But does she give you no hope?"

"She gives a little hope. Oh, yes! She admits that, if Agatha should still like me after she has been in the world a little, she should think it time to discuss the matter with Mr. Usherwood."

"That's rather vague. But is that all she said?"

"She asked me a few questions," replied Lovell, colouring again. She asked me if it was true I had only £800 a-year. I said it was true, but I had expectations. Then she said that was an additional reason for waiting; and wound up by expressing a hope I would promise never to have any *tête-à-têtes* with Miss Usherwood, or

in any way attempt to win her affections. This of course I at once promised, and there the matter rests."

"Well, I will be your friend, dear Mr. Lovell. You may rely upon me helping you all in my power."

"Forgive me," said Lovell, with some hesitation—"I should be sorry to seem ungrateful. But my conscience would not be at peace if I thought there was any thing—I hardly know how to express myself—any thing like management or scheming to frustrate Lady Maud's wishes."

"Nothing shall be done but in self-defence, Mr. Lovell. Make your mind easy. Dear mamma and I quite understand each other, and if I mistake not there will be little need of scheming. What we want is merely fair play. Trust to me, and all will be well. And now I must bid you good-bye, for I hear the church clock striking the half-hour, and I am wanted at home."

So soon as she had parted from Lovell, and saw the grey chimneys of the Manor-house gleaming through the thick foliage of the elms which separated it from the farm-buildings behind, her spirits again sank, and her heart fluttered. What should she say to Nugent? How explain the *contretemps* of the day before, in a way least likely to lower her in his opinion, and at

the same time best calculated to satisfy, or at least appease, him?

She entered the house through the sash-window in the drawing-room, and, taking off her garden hat, she went hastily to Nugent's library, knocked at the door in compliance with the invariable rule of the household before entering the room, and waited for him to speak. No sound, however, was heard, and Gertrude accordingly gently opened the door to make sure.

Through the sombre light of the old-fashioned apartment she saw Nugent sitting in his arm-chair asleep. He had had but little rest the night before. Hour after hour had he laid awake on the sofa-bed in his dressing-room that he sometimes occupied, endeavouring to devise some plan by which he might render his home more peaceful and Gertrude more happy. The course he had decided upon was not unattended with trial. It was a great wrench to give up the avocations which had become by degrees a pleasure as well as a duty, and gave a purpose and object to his daily life. It was no slight trial to enter upon scenes and occupations foreign to his disposition. But it seemed to him that circumstances irresistibly impelled him to take this course; and this being so, he had good hope that all would be well with him. Moreover, nothing

could be a more bitter affliction than the sense of growing alienation between himself and Gertrude, and the shipwreck of his domestic happiness. Any trouble would be less difficult to endure than this. So, having once settled in his own mind that he was acting for the best, Nugent felt comparatively reconciled to the prospect awaiting him, and wearied out by harassing thoughts and by a sleepless night, had no sooner thrown himself into his arm-chair than he dropped off in a quiet slumber.

Now Gertrude, when her eyes fell upon his face pale with past watching but now peaceful in repose, felt a tender feeling of regret steal over her heart, and with a woman's instinct hastened across the room to fling her arms round his neck, and, awaking him with a kiss, ask pardon for all she had done contrary to his wishes. But at the very moment when, with eyes full of love and pity and her sweet face beaming with affection, she was stretching out her arms towards him, and had nearly reached the chair where he was reclining—at that very moment she heard from one corner of the dusky library, a voice exclaim in a low but emphatic whisper—

“Hush—he's asleep. You'll wake him!”

Gertrude started as if from the thrill of an electric shock, and glancing round the room saw Edward Harrill

bending forwards from his chair in a corner of the room, his black eyes watching Gertrude with the vigilance of a North American Indian, and his brows knit as if expressive of angry admonition.

Now it must be confessed that this little interruption would have been by no means agreeable at any other time, or under any other circumstances. It is rather aggravating when you intend to be unusually tender and affectionate to the husband or wife of your bosom, to detect suddenly the presence of a third party carefully gazing at the scene. Much more was it annoying to Gertrude at the present moment, especially when it is remembered that the caution uttered by Edward partook of the character of a reproach, and seemed to place him in a position of superiority to herself. We fear, then, we must admit that her beautiful face turned crimson with indignation. Fire flashed and scintillated from those deep blue eyes capable of expressing such thrilling sentiment, and so ardent a devotion; that exquisitely-chiselled upper lip quivered with emotion; those delicate nostrils dilated with passion; that soft little white hand was clenched with almost warlike intentions. A painful spectacle you will say. Yet we rather suspect ladies who have any feelings at all—and we do not pretend to assert

that all are so provided—would have given way under the circumstances to a fit of indignation quite as intense as that we are feebly endeavouring to portray.

In a voice which was intended for a whisper, but which vibrated through the room with the distinctness of one of the late Mr. Kean's happiest efforts at stage articulation, Gertrude exclaimed—

“Leave the room this instant, sir!”

Now, if this had been addressed to him by a man, under the influence of a similar whirlwind of passion, we suspect Mr. Edward Harrill would have then and there flatly declined in no very complimentary language to stir a foot. But a woman, and such a woman as Gertrude, was a totally different matter. He rose from his seat with the docility of a school-boy who has a particular objection to be flogged, and made for the door as fast as he possibly could, feeling more in a regular fright than he had ever done in his life before.

But at the same instant of time that Gertrude's quivering whisper smote Edward into a state of unwonted humility, it roused Nugent out of his sleep with the shock of an earthquake. The roar of a salvo of artillery could scarcely have given him such a violent jerk, as those half-dozen penetrating, passionate words,

hissed through the rosy lips of his beautiful young wife.

"What—what—what is the matter?" exclaimed Nugent, wildly. Gertrude, we need scarcely say, burst into tears. It is in woman, nature's safeguard against the internal combustion of passion.

"That horrid, disagreeable, wicked boy!" she at length sobbed. "I should like to wring his neck!"

"My love!" exclaimed Nugent, "what *has* he done?"

"I would have wrung it if I had not been afraid of waking you,"—another sob—"The artful wretch!" And she stamped as if she almost believed Edward's face was placed conveniently under her foot.

Nugent was rather shocked.

"This violent passion, my dear Gertrude, is wrong. If Edward has behaved ill, he shall answer for it. But there is no need to give way to such bitter animosity. Consider, we all of us now and then need forbearance at each other's hands."

Gertrude only answered by sobs.

Nugent continued—

"What if I had fallen into such a fury yesterday when I came home, and found my quiet home polluted by indecent revelry?"

"I was going to explain," now hurriedly interrupted

Gertrude, with an occasional sob ; “I was going to tell you how it all came about. I was very sorry. The people changed all their plans, and it was arranged to have a cold dinner after service instead of a cold luncheon before, and then Lord Swampshire came with his French valet and quantities of game, and I didn’t know what to do, and I was very, very sorry !”

“What if I had gone into such a fury as you did just now ?” continued Nugent, gravely keeping to the point,

“I should have liked it much better,” passionately rejoined Gertrude, “then you’re going to bed, and sulking all night !”

It would come out, but she was almost frightened at her boldness, and hastily tried to soften the words by a smile ; but, finding it made her hysterical, was obliged once more to take refuge in tears. Nugent was rather hurt. He thought of the long weary hours of sleepless anxiety which he had passed, and was silent.

“I was just coming to tell you how sorry I was,” Gertrude continued, wiping away her tears, “and was going to ask you to forgive me, when that horrid boy told me to take care not to wake you. Was it not impertinent ? As if I did not know what was best for you !”

And she gently took his hand.

"Well," rejoined Nugent, "say no more about it. The boy probably meant no harm. But, no matter. He will not be with us many more days."

Gertrude felt a transient sting of remorse when she understood he was going.

"I don't want him to go. It was so stupid of him! That's what I blame him for. Don't you think, dear, that stupid people vex us more than wicked people?"

"It ought not to be the case, Gertrude."

"Oh! I think wicked people are often so very agreeable!"

Nugent looked shocked, and reverted to the subject of Edward.

"He leaves us very shortly."

"But why? I don't care about him. So you do not get to like him better than you do me, which seems I must say highly probable."

"Nonsense, my dear Gertrude—nonsense! The fact is, a little change will be good for us. I think of removing to London for two or three months, and from thence going to some other part of the country for a year or two. Shall you like it, dear?"

Somehow or other Nugent did not enjoy the instantaneous alacrity with which she replied, clapping her

hands with joy—"How delightful! How kind of you to think of it! How very delightful!"

Yet he felt it was foolish, and repressed his feelings manfully. Then, taking her arm, he proposed having a turn on the lawn to talk over their plans quietly.

In a very few days the Manor-house Farm was simply turned upside down. Such a packing, and locking up, and taking of inventories, and giving away of old things, and burning of papers, and opening and shutting drawers and boxes, and slamming of doors, and taking down of curtains, and pulling up of carpets! Visitors dropping in to take leave, and politely find out why "those Nugents" were going from home. Friends in the agricultural line clad in leather gaiters, stump-ing in and out of Nugent's library. Poor people besieging the back-door to glean a few last favours, or more disinterestedly to catch a farewell glimpse of the squire and his lady. As for Mrs. Finchley, she had never quite got over the Sunday dinner party, and this new element of disorder and disruption of old associations was too much for her. She quite broke down, and by advice of Mr. Grierson, the surgeon, was removed to a neighbouring cottage where she was well taken care of, and did nothing all that day but sit in an arm-chair before

the kitchen fire, bent up in a ball, rocking to and fro with a portentously ugly cap on her head, croning old nursery songs in a very quavering voice scarcely audible a few yards off—songs which she had sung to Nugent when he was a little urchin perched on her knee in the housekeeper's room.

All preparations come to an end some time or other, and so it was in this instance. Gertrude was casting a last look round her boudoir to see whether every thing was locked up that ought to be locked up, and all fit arrangements made preparatory for a long absence, when she heard a tap at the door, followed by the entrance of Lucy, who was carrying a parcel wrapped in a newspaper.

“Well, Lucy, don't tire yourself. You look paler than ever. I wish you were as happy as I am at the thought of a change, and then it might make you well again. But what have you in your hand?”

“It is a parcel, ma'am, which I have been keeping for my poor brother : he asked me to take care of it for him,” rejoined Lucy with tears in her eyes. “I came to ask, ma'am, if you have room for it somewhere, for I'm afraid of losing it in strange places—and I do hope to hear from him soon, and then he might ask for it.”

“Very well, Lucy, by all means. Take it up-stairs,

and put in my box. It will be as safe there as any where."

Lucy thanked her, and was retiring when Gertrude called out—

"And, by the bye, Lucy, as you are going up stairs, just take this marble tazza with you. It ought to be locked up somewhere."

"Certainly, ma'am! You needn't trouble to open the door. It's very light, and I have one hand quite free."

So saying, away tripped Lucy, carrying the tazza with the paper parcel upon it.

Now, it so chanced that, just as Lucy reached the top of the stairs, the stair carpet, from which the rods had been moved preparatory to its being folded up in the absence of the family, gave way under her light footstep, and for one moment she was in danger of falling. Her chief thought, after saving herself, was to save the tazza from being broken. But, on recovering her balance, the parcel slipped off the tazza, and fell over the banisters down into the hall below. "It's all right," she said; "I will just put the tazza safe in Mrs. Nugent's room, and then run down and fetch the parcel." So she ran across the passage, put the tazza in Gertrude's room, and then hastened down-stairs for the parcel.

"Not very honourable, Mr. Edward, looking into par-

cels that don't belong to you!" exclaimed Lucy with some anger, as she saw Edward turning over the leaves of a richly bound volume with a good deal of excitement.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lucy—I do indeed! But the parcel burst open in falling, and the book took my fancy, and the beads too. What are they for? Are they Mrs. Nugent's? Do you know, Miss Lucy, I had such an odd sensation when I first saw them?"

"I dare say you had. Conscience pricked you for touching what didn't belong to you."

"What a pretty coat-of-arms!" continued Edward, still keeping hold of the missal. "And the motto, 'Dare and Do.' I like that. It's manly!"

"Come; I am in a hurry, Mr. Edward, and can't stop. It's to go in Mrs. Nugent's box, and the man's waiting to cord it. So, if you please, make haste."

She seized the book and the beads, wrapped the paper round them, and, tying up the parcel with a piece of twine, ran with it up-stairs.

Edward looked after her with an expression of deep perplexity on his countenance.

"I must have dreamed it!" he added at last, and then went moodily out into the farm-yard to watch the steam-engine perform its daily task of thrashing, win-

nowing, turnip-crushing, chopping hay, and bruising oats.

Nugent and Lovell happened to pass through the stack-yard, and saw Edward seated on a heap of straw gazing fixedly at the throbbing engine unwearily pursuing its task, and sending out occasional puffs of smoke that floated away over the tops of the tallest elms.

"How quietly Edward took the intelligence of our going away and leaving him with you! He hardly moved a muscle of his face when I told him. Only said he supposed 'What must be, must be.'"

"He scarce realises it yet," said Lovell.

"Do you think that's it?" asked Nugent.

"Well, I hope it is. Otherwise I should put another interpretation upon his seeming indifference."

"What's that?"

"Simply, that he has not the smallest intention of remaining with me," answered Lovell.

"Why, where could he go?" asked Nugent.

"Where? Why, off in pursuit of Oliver Nugent, to be sure!" rejoined the other with a smile.

CHAPTER III.

NEWS FROM MAY FAIR.

THE departure of the Nugents for London was rather a severe shock to Mr. Usherwood. His health had been in an unsatisfactory state during the last two years. In fact, he had never entirely recovered from the effects of his sudden illness at the time of the railway riots. He was the less able, therefore, to bear up against unexpected trials and disappointments.

Fondly attached to Gertrude, his eldest daughter, who fully reciprocated his affection, and whose childhood he ever associated with the days of careless ease and enjoyment immediately succeeding his retirement from business and marriage to Lady Maud, Mr. Usherwood was made thoroughly wretched by the announcement of her change of residence. Hitherto he had never allowed the notion of being separated from her to enter his head; and when the plan was broken to him, gave way to much irritability and impatience. In fact, so excited did he become, that Nugent, with the best intentions,

took a rather rash step in the hope of reconciling him to Gertrude's departure. He let the old man understand, though in a vague sort of way, that their removal from the Manor Farm had something to do with domestic misunderstandings and disagreements. Nugent spoke with much affection of Gertrude, and expressed himself with his accustomed moderation and caution. But his father-in-law was in a morbidly excited state, and immediately jumped to the conclusion that Gertrude was unfortunate in her married life, and her peace and happiness irretrievably ruined. So he took to brooding over the matter more than was good for him—at least, so Lady Maud and all the doctors said. His distress on this one point gave a tinge to all his thoughts. The future became darker and darker, whilst out of the misty regions of the past issued a long train of thoughts and recollections that oppressed and afflicted him.

The enjoyment of the good things of this life was greatly impaired by bodily indisposition. Independently of this, he began to have a faint suspicion that comfort of this material kind was a very hollow affair, and nothing else than a temporary diversion of mind from matters of infinitely greater importance.

Thus it came about that Mr. Usherwood felt like a

ship cast adrift from her moorings. The world and himself seemed to be parting one from the other. Yet he had not grasped firm hold of any thing which promised comfort and support in lieu of what he was losing. So matters remained for a few weeks after Gertrude and himself, with many tears, had bade each other farewell. He was dejected, irritable, feeble. One custom, however, he had adopted, which some people might have thought a good augury. He had taken to read his Bible, and that very assiduously. No one heard him make any remark on the subject of religion; but daily, for an hour or two at a time, did he sit in his library with an immense family Bible open before him full of explanatory notes, which he appeared to study with the anxiety of a man whose heart was in his work.

A few weeks, then, after the Nugents had left Okenham, Mr. Usberwood was in his library, poring over the family Bible aforesaid. He was busy with some particular passage and did not hear the door open, nor was he conscious of any one's presence until there glided between him and the page of scripture before him, the broad sheet of the "Times" newspaper. The old man started, and looking up beheld the comely face of Lady Maud, smiling at him with an expression of playful remonstrance.

"My love," she said, "you will really injure your eyes over that venerable volume. Do shut it up for the present, draw your chair nearer to the fire, and read the second leader in to-day's 'Times.' It will amuse you, really."

"Maud," rejoined the other, "I am worn out with the 'Times.' I have read it all my life, and I don't know that I have ever got any good from it."

"But it is so very clever, that second leading article!"

"What a dismal thing a newspaper is!" the old man proceeded. "What a record of crime! Look at that murder in the north. Look at the bank swindle. Look at the police reports. Why, a newspaper is nothing but a Newgate calendar. Take it away, Maud, dear—take it away!" And he thrust the newspaper from him, and began turning over the leaves of his Bible.

Lady Maud was not, however, to be baffled. Stopping down to kiss his now careworn forehead, she said in a cheerful voice—

"Ah! I have something in my pocket which you will, I think, be inclined to notice more graciously. A nice long letter from our darling in town!"

"What, from Gertrude?" asked her husband with something like animation. "Let me have a look at it." He took the letter, and, disposing himself comfort-

ably in his arm-chair, commenced to read it, whilst Lady Maud retiring to the sofa devoted herself to the perusal of the "Times."

After some preliminary sentences, the letter went on as follows :—

"My brain is quite in a whirl with all these gaieties, but I suppose I shall get used to them by degrees. And yet I hardly wish it; for I am ashamed to say that with me novelty is the very essence of enjoyment. Sir Reginald scolds me for this sometimes, and says the secret of real happiness is, to find pleasure in things old and familiar, in fact, what the world calls stale. But Sir Reginald is really too philosophical for me. The concert at Hampstead Abbey was really delicious! Only fancy an ancient—no, not exactly ancient—but old-fashioned, picturesque mansion, with larch and pinasters all round it, though so close to London. Arched doorways, mullioned windows, ceilings of carved oak or at all events stained red deal, curious antique staircase—it was bought a great bargain in Wardour Street last summer—suits of armour in polished steel standing upright like the ghost in Hamlet in unexpected corners and odd passages; curious old swords and primitive pistols, and antediluvian muskets hanging against the wall—but these were hired from Nathan's

for the occasion—fine suite of rooms hung with really good pictures by the best English landscape painters, interspersed with torn venerable-looking banners to give the rooms an air of antiquity. Fancy all this, and then outside, myriads upon myriads of coloured lamps hung in festoons from tree to tree! Inside, all was a blaze of light! Six footmen with powdered heads bowing in the entrance hall in so aristocratic a manner that I really thought at first it was a masquerade, and the footmen were gentlemen in disguise! The Duchess of Freemantle, Lady Sparrowgrass, the Honourable Mrs. Plumelet, and no end of great people were sweeping through the anteroom, as Miss Hawkshaw, the Misses Fazackerley, and myself, with Mr. Fazackerley and Sir Reginald reached the top of the stairs.

“Lady Blanche Motcombe, our hostess, is a sweet, pensive-looking lady—a widow, and much admired. She wore a silver grey *moire-antique*, with black lace trimmings and ruby velvet head-dress, and looked very sweet. I wore my pale rose silk which you may remember of old, but Lucy and I worked hard the day before and trimmed it with black lace. This, and a wreath of pink and white hawthorn with pearl dew-drops, looked uncommonly well I assure you.

“Well, such an awkward thing happened! You know the grand Italian singers engaged for the concert insisted on bringing with them a limited number of personal friends. This was all well and good. But two or three subordinate performers, players upon the piano and such like, took the liberty of bringing *their* friends, and a good many of them, too. Such a strange set! Well, I had taken Sir Reginald’s arm, for the crowd was immense, when Mr. Fazackerley, who was close by, was introduced by Miss Hawkshaw to her friend Arabella Masham leaning on the arm of a tall dark man with black mustaches. ‘Mr. Fazackerley, Miss Masham; Miss M., Mr. F., &c.’ So far so good. But Mr. Fazackerley, who had been working his way through a crowd of the musicians’ friends just alluded to, exclaimed, by way of saying something lively—

“‘What an extraordinary set of creatures there are yonder! Did you know, Miss Masham, how in the world they got here?’ There was an awful pause.

“‘Allow me, Mr. Fazackerley, to introduce Colonel Motcombe to you, Lady Blanche’s brother-in-law!’ rejoined Miss Masham with nervous impetuosity. I was really afraid there would be a scene. But Sir Reginald came to our assistance. How strange he is! Seem-

ingly so absent and dreamy, yet on occasions so full of energy and presence of mind !

“ ‘ Most extraordinary creatures, truly ! ’—he observed, carrying on the conversation with Arabella Masham, and at the same time pointing carelessly to an Indian cabinet with glass doors, in which thirteen mandarins in rare china were ranged in a row, each squinting more horribly than the other— ‘ Most extraordinary creatures ! Trophies, I presume, from the war in China. ’ Then, in a whisper to Fazackerley, meant to be overheard, ‘ where Colonel Motcombe distinguished himself so much. ’ The colonel’s dark face immediately beamed with smiles, and so the matter ended. The music began, and we hastened to get places. Then followed ice, negus, and coffee. And after that three hours’ incessant dancing. But do not be frightened, dearest mamma, I only dance three waltzes, in accordance with a solemn compact with Oliver who seldom goes out of an evening, but lets me do what I like, provided I keep to his conditions. It is very kind of him, and Sir Reginald, who never dances, says Oliver is quite right to put a little restraint upon me. So, part of the evening, I have to sit down. But Sir Reginald, or somebody or other, is sure to come and talk to me, and it is not at all dull.

Now, dear mamma, do not think I am trying to forward your views about Agatha, for you know I am all on Lovell's side. Ask me any thing else, and I will try to do it. But I cannot bear to see poor Lovell supplanted by Sir Reginald—I cannot, indeed!”

Up to this point Mr. Usherwood had read with apparent pleasure, although now and then an expression of anxiety crossed his face. But when he came to this passage, he placed the letter on the table with a trembling hand, and with a little of his ancient deferential awe of Lady Maud, exclaimed—

“Now, my darling—now, my dear Maud; now, don't let us have any thing of this kind of thing—don't now—don't!”

Lady Maud's eyes were raised in inquiring wonderment, “What could Mr. Usherwood mean?”

“Now, Maud dear, you know what I mean. You know very well! What's this about Lovell and Agatha? What's this, I say? What's this about ‘forwarding views,’ with reference to Agatha and Sir Reginald? Have we not had warning enough? Now, dear Maud, to oblige me, I beg you will drop it at once. Don't concoct plans. If the two love each other, well and good; but don't let us plot, and plan, and scheme about

it. I must insist—that is to say, dear Maud, oblige me by dropping it.”

Lady Maud was rather taken aback. “How indiscreet of me to let him see that part of the letter! But who would have thought he would have made such a fuss over it.” Then added aloud, whilst she seated herself in a chair by her husband, and gently grasped his hand,—

“Dear love, you vex yourself about shadows. Nugent and Gertrude are really very happy. Look what confidence he places in her, and how she enjoys herself!”

“I know you are cleverer than I am, Maud, by a great deal. But I tell you I don’t like it. Look at that letter! She scarcely alludes to her husband. It is all Sir Reginald. Sir Reginald did this. Sir Reginald said that. I don’t like it, Maud—I don’t, indeed!”

And the old man leant back in his chair, and hid his face in his hands.

“My love, you are tired this morning. Here, it is time for your strengthening mixture;” and her ladyship hastened to a side-table, and pouring out some concoction prescribed by Mr. Grierson, half stimulant, half sedative, presented it to her husband, who drank

it off mechanically, with a kind of child-like submission.

"Now, dear, you had better have your afternoon nap," added Lady Maud, whilst she arranged the pillows for him on the sofa.

Mr. Usherwood immediately extricated himself from his arm-chair, and betook himself to the sofa. But, as he lay down, he put his hand on Lady Maud's wrist, and said with some approach to energy—

"Maud, I must see Lovell. I want to talk to him about Agatha."

"Consider, my dear—consider! He has never opened his lips to her on the subject. He has only casually intimated the matter to me, and on my gently pointing out that he was not precisely an eligible 'parti,' he shrank into himself, and promised not to renew the subject for a twelvemonth."

"I like him all the better for it. After all, he has a comfortable income, and a good position, and he's a member of a respectable profession. A minister of the established church."

Lady Maud's blue eyes lit up with that faint fire which was the usual sign of her being displeased, and her cheek was suffused with an evanescent crimson. But her husband, though the trembling of his

hand upon her wrist showed the agitation he experienced, did not give way.

“Maud, my dear Maud!” he exclaimed. “Bear with me. I have always striven to please you. Let me have my own way about Agatha. I don’t think I am very long for this world—perhaps I may not have many more requests to make to you——”

Lady Maud hastily brushed a tear from her long eyelashes, and exclaimed—

“Hush—hush, my dear! You are growing quite morbid. You are, indeed! Come, lie down, and have your nap. As for Lovell, I will send for him at once. You shall say whatever you like to him.”

“Not to-day, my good, kind Maud—not to-day! I am a little exhausted. But to-morrow I should really like to have a talk with him. I will settle nothing. I will only see how the land lies.”

The old gentleman lay down, and Lady Maud, after a few words of affection, floated softly out of the room, and hastened to her boudoir. Here she instantly seated herself at her writing-table, and dashed off a few lines to Lovell, asking him to visit Mr. Usherwood the next day. The style of the note was kind and friendly, but there was an ominous little postscript at the bottom to this effect—

“You see how great is the confidence I place in your good faith and gentlemanly feeling. Some might abuse this confidence, and take advantage of the opportunity offered them. But I know Walter Lovell too well to suppose that he will, by either look or word, deviate from the understanding mutually agreed upon a few weeks since.

“M. U.”

Having despatched this note, she took up a half-finished letter to her sister, Mrs. Clair, who was making a tour in Scotland; and wrote as follows:—

“By the bye, my dear, I almost forgot the immediate purpose of my writing to you. I have thought better of your kind invitation to the dear girls. The weather is delicious for a tour, and I think a few weeks in the Highlands would do them both good. So, if you have not changed your plans, or repented of your kind offer, they shall set off for the north next week—say Tuesday, if that day would suit Colonel Clair to escort them, but of this I will of course make sure.”

This business having been settled, Lady Maud's manner, which to an attentive observer might have seemed a little perturbed, became as tranquil as usual. She seated herself at the piano, and played over the last new opera with much spirit and execution.

What Lovell's feelings were when he received this summons, we shall not attempt to describe. But, after the first throb of pleasure had passed, something like dejection and self-distrust began to steal over his mind. To pay another visit, perhaps several visits, to Beaumont-house, where he was pretty sure to meet one very dear to him, was certainly a source of joy. But then he remembered his promise to Lady Maud to hold himself aloof from Agatha for at least a twelvemonth, or if, accidentally meeting her in society, to bear himself towards her as if she was nothing more than an ordinary acquaintance. He remembered all this, and felt that to visit regularly at Beaumont-house, and yet preserve a cold demeanour towards Agatha, was almost too much for his own strength, and scarcely fair to her. So, after the first pleasurable thrill, this invitation of Lady Maud became a positive source of pain and anxiety to him. Nevertheless, he resolved to comply with her request, at all events for this one time. He might have some fresh explanations, and perhaps arrive at a better understanding with Lady Maud on the subject so near his heart.

On the day following, Lovell therefore prepared to present himself at Beaumont-house. But, having a good deal of parochial work to get through, he left home early

in the morning, purposing to call at Beaumont-house on his way back. The day was not far advanced, however, when an incident occurred which somewhat altered his plans.

At the angle of the road leading to Rentworth, he was overtaken by a rather coarse-looking man with a blotched red face, wrapped in a rough overcoat, and mounted on a shaggy pony trotting along the flat road through the marshes with scornful alacrity, as if mentally comparing them with the precipitous mountains of its native Wales.

"Your obedient servant, sir!" exclaimed the red-faced man somewhat obsequiously—"If I am not mistaken, your name is Lovell?"

Lovell bowed.

"The Reverend Walter Lovell, rector of Okenham?" continued the man.

Lovell again bowed.

"Exactly so! Then, Mr. Lovell, it's a queer coincidence—a very queer coincidence! I may say a providential coincidence! Why, I am Dr. Crayfoot, of Clawthorp Retreat, and you are the very identical gentleman I want to see!"

Lovell did not greet this important intelligence

with as much enthusiasm as the doctor seemed to expect.

"You have heard of Dr. Crayfoot, eh, Mr. Lovell?" inquired the doctor, edging his pony nearer, and eyeing Lovell with an affectionate leer.

Lovell bowed for the third time, and this time with considerable stiffness. He had heard of Dr. Crayfoot, and what he had heard was any thing but satisfactory.

"Well, Mr. Lovell," proceeded the doctor, "I'll tell you all about it out of hand. Sharp's the word with me, Mr. Lovell! Ain't there a wench named Lucy Winthrop in Squire Nugent's service, or Farmer Nugent I've heard some call him?"

"Lucy Weston is Mrs. Nugent's lady's maid," replied Lovell.

"Well Weston, or Winthrop. What's the odds?"

'A rose by any other name,' &c.

You know the rest. Excuse my quoting Shakspeare. Well, the long and the short of it is, I'm on the lookout for the wench. She's coming to Clawthorp Retreat."

Lovell immediately pictured poor Lucy with a shaved head, and her arms strapped to her side.

"You don't say so?" he exclaimed with much concern.

“Ho, ho, ho! You think she’s coming as a patient? Very good! Mrs. Nugent’s lady’s maid! Very good! No! The fact is,” said Crayfoot, drawing his pony nearer to Lovell, “her brother came to me as an attendant—a keeper, in short—and met with an uncommon ugly accident—uncommon ugly! And she’s coming down post-haste to nurse him. Like a good sister ought, Mr. Lovell, eh?”

Lovell wondered at the doctor’s story, but let him go on.

“She’s expected at the Manor-house this blessed day,” continued the other, “and I meant to have driven over to fetch her; but, as the deuce would have it, off comes the wheel of my dog-cart, so that plan’s shelved. And I’ve ridden fourteen mile, Mr. Lovell—fourteen mile—to meet the wench, and hire some trap to take her home in. It’s a bore, Mr. Lovell, but what then? So I do my duty I’m happy. That’s my character! You may think me soft. Possibly I am. But then it’s my misfortune, not my fault.” And Dr. Crayfoot, by way of evincing the softness of his nature, grinned from ear to ear, and winked at Lovell with more familiarity than he quite liked.

“Glad, Mr. Lovell, to have made your acquaintance,” continued the doctor. “But business first, pleasure

afterwards. I am a stranger in these parts. Will you show me the way to the Manor-house Farm, Mr. Lovell, if I'm not making too bold?"

Lovell pointed out the way, and Dr. Crayfoot, sticking his heels into his pony's sides, and at the same time giving the animal a very unnecessary cut across the ears with his heavy whip, trotted off at the rate of ten miles an hour.

Lovell meditated for a few seconds. Then, desirous of learning something more about Lucy and her brother, struck into the fields, and made for the Manor Farm by a short cut.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REV. WALTER LOVELL.

THE Manor Farm had already begun to wear a different aspect to that of old. Although not absolutely neglected since Nugent's departure for town, less vigilant care was expended upon the gardens and shrubberies surrounding it. Long summer shoots of flowering shrubs hung here and there across the winding walks; the Banksian roses and honeysuckles that covered the house, trespassed upon doors and windows, and, waving to and fro in the summer wind, flapped against the shutters with a melancholy sound. Some of the garden borders looked gay with flowers, but others were bare and brown; now and then an impertinent weed obtruded into notice; and occasionally the coarse print of footsteps on the flower-beds offended the eye. The iron gate leading from the lawn into the field was barricaded, and blocked up by a large stone roller pushed up against it. For the gate, having been one

evening left ajar, an adventurous heifer forced its way into the garden, browsed on the shrubs and evergreens, and left the impression of its hoofs deeply indented in the soft surface of the lawn.

The only room occupied in the Manor-house was one at the back, where the bailiff and his wife were installed by way of protection to the premises. As for the farm stock, live or dead, the whole had been sold off with the exception of a few cows and a score of Southdowns, and all the land except the home ground let off for the season.

Nugent, when he took any thing in hand, aimed to do it thoroughly, and thought he should feel more independent if his farm were for the time off his hands. His plan was to seek in a new scene, and amidst fresh occupations, a renewal of perfect confidence between Gertrude and himself. He felt a misgiving that, with all his honest desire to do what was strictly right, he had not made sufficient allowance for his young wife's faults and weaknesses. He suspected that, taking her from so different a sphere from his own, deliberately and of his own free choice, it would have evinced not merely a truer wisdom on his part but a deeper and tenderer affection, if for the time he had literally given up every thing to the one task of making her happy,

and knitting closely together those ties of affection which at the commencement of married life are often so frail and unsubstantial. Therefore he wished to cut off the past by a decisive effort, and enter as it were on a new phase of existence. He little thought that the seeds of wretchedness were so widely and deeply sown. He little anticipated the storm which, to the eyes of unconcerned spectators, already hung darkly on the horizon of the future. He much underrated the mischief caused by a smothered sense of unkindness, and the bitter conviction that sympathy, if found at all, must be sought in hearts which cannot and ought not to be ours.

To return, however, to the Manor-house. There was, then, a certain air of desolation beginning to steal over the gardens and shrubberies, and over the house itself. Lovell himself confessed that it made him wretched to go within half a mile of the place, and accordingly he seldom went there. But one individual in the household took a very different view of the matter. This was Edward Harrill, who, whenever allowed to take a solitary walk, which was not very often, found himself, he scarce knew how, bearing down upon the Manor Farm.

Here, seated on the railings, or stretched upon the lawn, he would linger for an hour or so at a time,

absorbed in recollections sometimes sad, sometimes pleasing. Lovell did not much approve of these visits. Yet, knowing the lad's excitable temperament, he rather strove to divert his thoughts by giving him employment, than run the risk of evoking a spirit of resistance by an unusual stretch of authority. Generally, therefore, Lovell made him his companion in his rides and walks, but on some occasions this could not be. The day of Lovell's rencontre with Crayfoot was one of these; and Edward, finding he had several hours to himself, set off straight to his favourite place of resort, and, vaulting over the hurdles dividing the field from the lawn, sat himself down on the stone roller barricading the gate, and was soon plunged in one of his usual reveries.

Edward's almost morbid attachment to Nugent did not arise entirely from peculiarity of temper and disposition. He was certainly of an impulsive excitable nature, keenly sensitive to injustice, passionately grateful for any thing like genuine kindness or affection. But the hardships of his early life, the scenes of wretchedness and outbreaks of cruelty experienced under Harrill's charge, when his only friend was a weak and sickly woman who defended him from blows and ill-usage almost at the risk of her life, and, more recently, his

dreary imprisonment in the Flintwood union workhouse—an imprisonment depressing and injurious even to ordinary lads, but specially to one of Edward's susceptible frame—all this had left a deep impression on his heart and mind.

He had never been conscious of a mother's patient tenderness, or of a father's protecting care, whilst he had been exposed to ill-usage and privation beyond that which falls to the lot even of the ordinary poor. For days and weeks together, especially on his first entrance into the workhouse, he had felt not merely fatherless and motherless, but absolutely without a friend in the world.

This would be rather an extraordinary sensation to many of our readers, and they must imagine it as well as they can.

Altogether then, apart from natural disposition, it is not strange that the first man who had truly stood to him in the place of a father; who had been kind, considerate, anxious to do him good and shield him from harm; who had in pure compassion rescued him from bodily and mental wretchedness; it is not strange that such an one should have roused the warmest sentiments of affection in Edward's heart.

Thus, upon Nugent were his thoughts and feelings concentrated, and he would willingly have died to be able to do some great thing on his behalf.

Edward, then, sat plunged in meditation for a long while; sometimes looking up at the house with its dreary row of closed shutters and its old-fashioned chimney-stack from whence no smoke now issued; sometimes closing his eyes, as if to shut out the present and recall the past. On a sudden he noticed for the first time that the front door was partly ajar, and, feeling a curiosity to see the inside of the house again, jumped up, and, pushing it open, went in. In one of the rooms he heard voices, and, making his way in that direction, suddenly found himself face to face with Lucy Winthrop. Edward flushed to the eyes, for he took for granted her master and mistress were either in the house or on their road to it, but he was soon undeceived.

Lucy was only on her way to see her brother, who was lying very ill somewhere in the neighbourhood.

So we are sorry to say that Edward, who at first had grasped Lucy's hand almost affectionately, now let it fall as if it were a stone, and walked impatiently towards the door. Poor Lucy, who was in a nervous distressed state of mind, sat down and began to cry. Whereupon our friend, very nearly crying too, hastened back, and sitting

down by her, very properly begged pardon for his unkindness, and said what he could to comfort her. They were generally pretty good friends; though Edward, as he rose gradually to a higher position, became naturally on less familiar terms than in old times. Still every now and then they met and conversed; and, as we have said, they were generally on good terms. But there was one topic on which, whenever it came in their way, they were sure to fall out. This was the respective merits of Mr. and Mrs. Nugent. Now, as luck would have it, after they had sat and talked for a few minutes chiefly about Lucy's brother and what was the matter with him, &c., Edward rather inconsiderately blurted out—

“And I hope Mrs. Nugent is kinder to your master than she used to be down here.”

Whereat Lucy, tossing her head, exclaimed—

“Indeed, Mr. Edward, I'm surprised you should talk of my mistress in that way. She's a great deal kinder than master deserves; for all I don't mean to find fault with master, but it is you as drives me to it.”

Edward rose with some anger, and rejoined—

“Well, it was foolish of me to touch upon the subject. You're right to stand by Mrs. Nugent. You're quite right. But I and all the world know that she's not half

as devoted and affectionate as the wife of such a man ought to be."

"You and all the world, Mr. Edward? I like that!" exclaimed Lucy, whilst her pale delicate face grew quite hot with indignation. "You and all the world, indeed! Well, I know one gentleman, and a fine, handsome, noble-hearted gentleman he is too, who totally differs from 'you and all the world.' Yes, totally!"

Edward was now very angry, and yet ashamed with himself for being angry with a lady's maid. He tried to pass the matter off with contempt.

"Oh, I dare say! Some vulgar fellow or other of your acquaintance. A butler, perhaps!"

"No, Mr. Edward—no! No such thing!" cried Lucy raising her voice. "I mean Sir Reginald Clinton, Baronet, of Llannellesmere, North Wales. He is a gentleman, if you like!"

"Well, and what of that? What business has he to interfere?" asked Edward, rather savagely.

"He is most kind to my lady, and takes care of her as tenderly as if he was her father, at balls and parties, whilst master is lazily snoring in bed."

"Don't be impertinent, Lucy!" peremptorily shouted Edward. And Lucy once more put her handkerchief to her eyes.

How long the strife would have proceeded we cannot say. For at that instant the clatter of hoofs was heard along the drive crossing the home ground. Edward stepped to the window, and perceived Dr. Crayfoot in the act of dismounting from his rough pony.

“What an ill-looking dog!” he mentally exclaimed.

Lucy sprang from her seat, and said she dared say it was the gentleman who was to fetch her to the asylum. But at the moment she spoke, Edward, uttering an exclamation of surprise and displeasure, suddenly opened the window, the sill of which was close to the ground, and jumping out made a sudden rush towards Dr. Crayfoot, exclaiming—

“Hi! you, sir! what are you meddling with that roller for? Hands off this minute!”

Dr. Crayfoot, who in point of fact was engaged in pushing aside the stone roller, to enable him to open the gate, startled by Edward’s sudden apparition, fairly turned tail, and, abandoning the roller, commenced scaling the fence. But seeing, on more careful inspection, that Edward was a mere youth, he altered his tack, and, poised astride on the top of the railing, hurled at Edward’s head a torrent of abuse well sprinkled with oaths, surpassing any thing the latter had heard except inside the walls of the Flintwood union workhouse.

At this juncture, however, whilst Edward, seizing a rake lying on the lawn, was threatening to fling it at the doctor unless he "held his jaw," and the doctor was vowing to gouge out Edward's eyes and make him swallow them afterwards, and Lucy was hurrying to and fro in quest of the bailiff, a third party arrived on the scene and restored peace and tranquillity.

This was Lovell, who, as we have said, started for the Manor Farm as well as the doctor, but went a short cut across the fields.

Edward, looking rather ashamed, bolted into the house and took refuge in the housekeeper's room, whither Lucy had also hastened in search of some one to keep the peace between Edward and the strange gentleman on the lawn.

"It's all right, Lucy!" exclaimed Edward. "Mr. Lovell's outside. We didn't come to blows. And I'm not sorry; for an ugly fellow like that has such an advantage over one. He don't mind a black eye for he has no beauty to spoil. But, I say, Lucy——" And he sat himself down with a grave expression of countenance in an old-fashioned arm-chair, whilst Lucy, who was putting on her bonnet and shawl, paused a moment to listen—"I am sorry I was so warm just now. Only

don't aggravate me by bringing up that Sir Reginald Clinton—a papist—and, as I've heard, a rakish sort of fellow into the bargain."

"He's a thorough gentleman, and very kind to my lady!" interposed Lucy.

"There!" exclaimed Edward. "Now you're beginning again. Well—I wish somebody would put my master on his guard against him!"

Lucy was about to make some rather hasty rejoinder when the front door bell rang with a loud peal, and she hastened to answer it. Edward after a moment's hesitation took his departure through the kitchen offices, made his way back to the rectory by a circuitous route, and, going to his bedroom, might have been heard pacing up and down for the next half hour.

Meantime Dr. Crayfoot explained to Lucy his intention of hiring a fly at the village inn to take her to Clawthorp, and Lovell told her to go to the rectory and have some dinner whilst the fly was getting ready.

At the word "dinner" the doctor's eyes twinkled, and he inwardly resolved to make one of the party. This, however, Lovell had no idea of permitting, partly because he was acquainted with the man's character, partly because he had overheard some of the lively exertions lavished on Edward as he walked up the field.

Dr. Crayfoot, then, remounted his pony, but jogged along the drive at a slow pace. Lovell walked by his side apparently anxious to part company at the first opportunity. But the doctor, on the contrary, appeared to be rather sociably inclined than otherwise. Ever and anon he reined up his pony, uttering some such words as, "By Jupiter, Mr. Lovell, this is a fine country!" or, "Well, well—what a blessed spot, to be sure! Ah, Mr. Lovell, you don't know how we working men yearn after a quiet life! A quiet life in such a blessed spot would be——" here Dr. Crayfoot positively rose in his stirrups with pious excitement, "would be a regular, downright paradise, sir—and no mistake!"

Lovell meanwhile silently pursued his way, until, reaching the gate into the main road, he held it open, and pointed with his stick to the village inn, the distant chimneys of which were visible over the high hawthorn hedge on one side of the road.

"Ay—ay! And that's the village inn—is it?" responded the doctor. "I'm fond of a village inn—very! But then my pony, Mr. Lovell—my pony! What am I to do with my pony?" And he caressed the animal with an unusual degree of tenderness and affection.

"There is plenty of stable-room at the inn," rejoined Lovell.

“ Ah, Mr. Lovell, ‘ a merciful man is merciful to his beast!’ ” and the doctor gently poked at Lovell with the end of his whip, as if he had said rather a good thing. “ I’m afeard of them low public-houses ; I am, indeed ! How do I know but little ‘ Bully Boy ’ ”—meaning his pony—“ might not catch the glanders ? No, sir—no ! That’s the sort of stabling where I like to see ‘ Bully Boy ’ lodged.” And the doctor pointed to the snug-looking rectory, a little way up the lane, with its comfortable stable and coach-house at the back.

Lovell looked provokingly obtuse, and even made a movement as if he was going to take his departure. Seeing this, the doctor, despairing to elicit any offer of hospitality from Lovell by hints and insinuations however broad, adopted a different tack. Bending down over “ Bully Boy’s ” shaggy neck, he exclaimed in a tone of voice meant to be confidential, but in reality rather suggestive of sore throat and cough—“ Hark’ee, Mr. Lovell, I’m a plain man, but mean well. Just tell me if that youngster’s any ways connected with you ? ”

“ He is a young friend of mine, and is staying at my house under my protection,” rejoined the other, somewhat stiffly.

“ Oh—indeed ! Very good. Excuse me, Mr. Lovell, but you see I’m a plain man—a plain man with a

warm heart. And I may add that my professional reputation is not to be sneezed at—not to be sneezed at by any means. Now, ‘that party,’”—designating whom he meant by lifting his elbow towards the direction taken by Edward—“‘that party’ is excitable. Queer, sir—queer!” here the doctor’s voice became, in his endeavours to be confidential, bronchial to a degree. “He’s queer, and needs attention. See it in his eye, sir. Yes, Mr. Lovell, I have not given my mind to the subject of moral insanity for nothing. Nor, I may say, my poor father before me. Now, that party needs watching. Yes, sir—watching. In fact, the best thing for him, the truest kindness, would be to let him see the inside of Clawthorp Retreat!”

Lovell’s impatience began to be plainly visible, and the doctor hastened to add—

“Why, it’s nothing, Mr. Lovell—nothing at all! What’s the difference between an infirmary and a mad-house? Six of one, half-a-dozen of the other. Why, sir, in more than one instance gentlemen come to me to be cured of their own accord! There’s the Honourable Mr. A. comes to me regularly once a-year. Says—‘Crayfoot, my fine fellow, here I am again! Come to see how you are getting on. You know what I mean, Cray. Can you give me a shake-down for a week or two, Cray?’”

The Hon. Mr. A. has humour, Mr. Lovell, a considerable fund of humour. ‘Cray,’ he goes on, ‘I’m uncommonly all-overish, I can tell you.’ Then he takes me on one side and says confidentially, as I may be talking to you just now, ‘Cray, in point of fact, I’m—a humming-top. Yes, Cray, I’m a humming-top. It is not generally known, but that’s what I am—a humming-top. And I want you to wind me up.’ With that the Hon. Mr. A. reels about for all the world like a top when it’s nearly spent, and I whistle for my assistants, and off he goes to the dangerous ward in a jiffy. A month after, Mr. Lovell, that man is electrifying the British House of Commons with mother-wit and racy eloquence! That’s the way we manage our patients. We cure them. And I’d engage to cure that youngster, Mr. Lovell—I would, sir. And at a low figure. For, as I say, I’m a plain man but have a warm heart.”

And Dr. Crayfoot sat back in his saddle to see the effect his proposal made upon Lovell’s mind.

Lovell, much to the doctor’s disgust, contented himself with making a hasty bow, and walked off at a smart pace in a contrary direction to that the doctor was about to take.

The latter, having gazed at his retreating figure with any thing but an amiable expression of countenance,

muttered an oath between his clenched teeth, and, giving Bully Boy a tremendous thump with the handle of his hunting-whip, trotted off to see what accommodation the "Red Lion" was capable of affording.

It was late that evening before the fly procured by Dr. Crayfoot at Okenham, stopped with Lucy and her luggage at the front door of the Clawthorp lunatic asylum. The roads were heavy, and the vehicle as well as the horse which drew it, none of the best. Moreover, the doctor had detained Lucy at the "Swampshire Arms," Rentworth, for an hour at least, whilst he carried on a mysterious conversation in the back-parlour of the inn with an ill-looking man whom he addressed in a familiar sort of way by the name of "Spot." It was dark, then, when she arrived, and the aspect of the place and the strange people she met, altogether depressed and disquieted her. But the expectation of once more seeing her brother and doing what she could to relieve his sufferings, greatly sustained her.

She hastened, under the guidance of Mrs. Sharker, towards the room where Winthrop lay confined to his bed; whilst Dr. Crayfoot—having in vain pressed her to have a sup of brandy and water—turned into his surgery, and consoled himself after the day's exertions with a full-flavoured cheroot.

He had scarcely, however, sat down, before Mrs. Sharker bolted into the room exclaiming—

“Here—I say, Cray, give us something for the girl. She’s off in hysterics.”

“Tut, tut, tut! Just what I expected! Why wouldn’t she take some brandy? I knew the wench would be upset when she first clapped eyes on him.”

Grumbling after this fashion he dropped some liquid out of a large bottle into a wine-glass, and handed it to the matron, who disappeared forthwith. After half an hour or so she returned.

“Well, how’s the little goose now?” inquired the doctor, knocking off the ash of his cigar.

“She don’t take on so much as she did,” responded the amiable Sharker. “But I doubt if you’ve mended the matter much by getting her down here. Bless’d if I don’t think we shall have two to nurse instead of one!”

“Sharker, I was in a fix. Squire Nugent had got scent of the fellow’s whereabouts. Besides, we shall screw something out of ’em, if I don’t mistake. Squire Nugent and his lady have already tipped me a ten-pound note——”

“Well done, Cray!” exclaimed Mrs. Sharker. “But, pray, what’s that for?”

“Why, as a little token of gratitude for my kind attentions to Lucy’s brother. Don’t you twig, Mrs. Sharker?” and the doctor grinned self-complacently, and took another pull at his cigar. Then added—“I’ve got a little plan in my pate which may do us good, Sharker. I have had a chat with poor Spottle, and I think ’twill work, but I’ll tell you more about it by-and-bye. I can’t talk with any comfort on an empty stomach. So bustle away, Sharker, and get me some victuals.”

Leaving Dr. Crayfoot to enjoy his supper, we must now return to Lovell, whom we left at the moment he had unceremoniously escaped out of the doctor’s clutches, and was hastening along the high-road.

Looking at his watch, Lovell found that the hour was approaching when he was expected to call at Beaumont-house; and accordingly lost no time in turning his steps thither.

It was with a quickened pulse and a kindling eye that Lovell, as he approached the entrance to the mansion, perceived Lady Maud and her two daughters in the act of ascending the flight of steps leading to the door. To catch even a glimpse of Agatha was great happiness; but Lovell was not a man to swerve from

his word. The danger, in fact, was lest his sensitive conscience should not lead him to the other extreme. To make sure of keeping on the safe side, he greeted Agatha less warmly than even Lady Maud and Jessie, and bowed to her with a face as composed and frigid as marble, whilst his heart was beating against his ribs like a small sledge-hammer. Now, this was all very well from one point of view, but not in another. It was rather too much of a trial for Agatha. Still, as Lovell could not bring himself to believe that a young lady, so exquisitely beautiful as Agatha appeared in his eyes, cherished any downright serious attachment to such a very inferior creature as himself, the mischief could scarcely be helped. It was his diffidence and modesty that were at the bottom of it.

Agatha, then, encountering the stern expression of Lovell's countenance, and the cold glance of his eye—he, poor fellow, desiring all the while nothing better than to be allowed to fling himself on his knees in the mud and proclaim his passion then and there—Agatha, wounded and vexed at this strange sort of greeting after nearly a month's separation, turned hurriedly and passed into the house without uttering another word. Jessie lingered behind gathering flowers. Lady Maud languidly pressed Lovell's hand, and professed that she

was charmed to see him. He must really, she said, look in oftener. Once a month at least he ought to give them an afternoon call. If they chanced to be out he could rest in the breakfast-room, and read the *Morning Post*. Lovell did not say that, perhaps had it not been for him, Beaumont-house, breakfast-room and all, might have been plundered and smashed by the Rentworth rioters two years since. But he felt for the moment hurt at this nonchalant reception. Her ladyship, however, having gently let him down, thought she might now show a little more kindness of manner, and, taking his arm, proposed a turn on the terrace in front of the house.

"I am a little uneasy," said Lady Maud, as they crossed the lawn, "about Mr. Usherwood, and feel that something ought to be done, and yet I scarcely know what. It is a case requiring very delicate treatment."

"I was concerned to hear that he was not so well," answered Lovell. "Perhaps the changeable weather has tried him a little."

"Mr. Lovell, understand me! I do not so much mean his bodily health. It is the mind, Mr. Lovell—the mind which seems to be unstrung. He is low and dispirited."

Lovell, not exactly knowing whither this was leading,

uttered some commonplace about the mind sympathising with the body, and for a few minutes they pursued their way in silence.

"The fact is," resumed Lady Maud, "I think he needs a little sensible advice; and you, Mr. Lovell, not being a mere clergyman, but knowing something of the world, might, I really believe, be of essential service in improving the tone of his mind."

"I shall be very happy to do my best. But I can hardly tell how I may hope to influence him for good until I have seen and talked with him."

"One thing is important," Lady Maud continued, speaking with some emphasis—"very important indeed, and I trust you will bear it in mind. He must read his Bible less, and novels and light literature more!"

Lovell almost dropped Lady Maud's arm in his astonishment.

"He must not read his Bible so much," she persisted firmly. "Of course, in moderation it is highly proper. A couple of chapters when the weather is too bad for going to church, or a few verses daily from the psalms or gospels—that is all very well. There are some nice little works published which are very handy for serious persons: such as 'Daily Dewdrops,' 'Crumbs for the Fasting,' 'The Christian's Bosom Friend,' containing short por-

tions of scripture of a consolatory character for every day in the year. But Mr. Usherwood will not be content with this. He launches forth into the *whole* Bible, and compares text with text, passage with passage, until I am sure his mind must be full of nothing else! This is running to extremes, and is prejudicial to his spirits. It makes him, Mr. Lovell, quite out of sorts."

"I am afraid I may not be able to entirely agree with your ladyship on this subject," responded Lovell with some hesitation. "I sometimes feel it should be a subject of congratulation to Christians that they have a good share of trouble and affliction."

Lady Maud fixed her penetrating eyes on Lovell in some perplexity.

"If every thing went smoothly with us," he continued, "I fear we should grow horribly hard-hearted. Certainly, if we don't accept our troubles in a right spirit, we are every way miserable. But if we take them humbly, and seek for help in the right quarter, we cannot fail to reap a blessing from them."

"Right, Mr. Lovell—quite right! Your sentiments are what I should have expected from you. I certainly felt something of the kind when my dear husband was taken ill so suddenly a few years since."

“If we are impatient under affliction, or only seek worldly consolation, or banish the remembrance from our mind the moment the trial has passed,” added Lovell, quietly returning the quick glance of his companion, “then we convert what might have been a blessing into a curse.”

Lady Maud sighed. Then, recovering herself, she assumed a lighter tone, and exclaimed—

“*Cela va sans dire*, my dear Mr. Lovell. I am quite of your mind. But just now, you see, I want you to disembarass yourself of the priest, and look at this matter as a man of the world.”

Lovell looked grave.

“Remember what that great philosopher, Mr. Edward Burke, said to a gentleman suffering from depression of spirits who asked his advice—‘Live pleasant.’ Those were his words. Sir Eliot Prichard quoted the story to me the other day,” added her ladyship in an explanatory tone—“and this is what I wish Mr. Usherwood to do.”

“Difficult advice to follow when the health is failing, and the mind ill at ease!” exclaimed Lovell—“I fear it is but a quack medicine!”

“Then do you really advise his poring over the family Bible all the morning?”

“I don’t say he should do nothing else. He ought to open his mind to a clergyman.”

Lady Maud did not appear quite satisfied. But not being inclined to prolong the discussion, turned towards the house, and said she would let Mr. Usherwood know he had arrived.

Lovell followed more leisurely. Entering the hall, he perceived that Agatha had left her bouquet of flowers on the side-table. Taking it up in his hand, Lovell looked at it for a few seconds as if tempted to carry it off; but, on consideration, only selected from it a spray of myrtle which he carefully placed in his pocket-book. No sooner, however, had he done so than some qualm of conscience seemed to seize him. Out came the pocket-book again, and with a sigh Lovell drew forth the myrtle, pressed it to his lips, and replaced it in the bouquet on the side-table, just as a servant came to summon him to Mr. Usherwood’s library.

Meanwhile Jessie, who, we are sorry to say, had been guilty of the impropriety of watching the whole of Lovell’s mysterious proceedings from the first landing of the staircase, darted away in the direction of Agatha’s bed-room. She found her sister leaning out of the window, pale and tearful.

“Aggie, dear, don’t be unhappy!” she said, affection-

ately, flinging her arms round her. "It's all right. I am sure of it, and I will tell you why."

Leaving these young ladies, we will follow Lovell to the library. Here he was closeted with Mr. Usherwood for a couple of hours. What passed between them it is not necessary to divulge, further than to explain that the conversation turned chiefly on two subjects, Lovell's attachment to Agatha in the first place, and, in the second, Mr. Usherwood's mental troubles and anxieties.

It was observable that the old man seemed a good deal the better for his talk with Lovell; and, though his health remained the same, he became more peaceful and contented. Lovell visited him pretty frequently, and with Lady Maud's entire approbation. Lovell did not understand this at first, but was soon undeceived. For on the third time of calling, as he was taking leave, Lady Maud softly pressed his hand, and said in her low musical voice—

"Thank you, Mr. Lovell, for so well remembering your promise. No one could have suspected by your manner towards Agatha that you regarded her as any thing more than an acquaintance! But it was not fair to subject you to so severe an *epreuve*, and I have lost no time in making an arrangement which I doubt not

will be a great relief to your mind. The girls started for Edinburgh yesterday morning. Thank you, Mr. Lovell—thank you, and good-by! *Au revoir!*”

We do not know how it was, but, as soon as Lovell had fairly parted from her ladyship, his demeanour became most extraordinary. Instead of walking at his usual steady pace down the park, he strode along as if for a wager; and, as soon as he was clear of the lodge, amused himself by vaulting over three gates along the roadside in rapid succession. After which he appeared to calm down, and walked homewards in a quiet, almost dejected mood.

Yet if at that moment he could have caught a glimpse of a certain letter Mr. Usherwood had written, and sealed up with directions on the back that his executors were to read it after his decease in the presence of Lady Maud, Lovell would have felt his spirits wonderfully revive. But this was not to be; and perhaps, according to his own reasonings with Lady Maud, it was for his true interest to endure the trial without any apparent prospect of relief or comfort.

CHAPTER V.

LIGHT THICKENS.

MEANTIME the Nugents are lodging in a pleasant house of modest proportions in one of the streets opening into Park Lane. There is the trim-looking parlour on the right-hand side of the door; there is the rather dingy bedroom at the back, converted by Nugent into a study, with a dressing-room beyond it. Above is a double drawing-room with plenty of furniture and a good piano. On the landing, a conservatory of contracted size, boasting on their first arrival of no flowers save a careworn geranium with elongated shoots evidently incapable of producing bud or blossom. This conservatory was now, however, a perfect blaze of various flowers brightly contrasted like the hues of a kaleidoscope. Over the drawing-room were the bedrooms. The place suited them well enough. It was not far from the Fazackerleys, who were very kind to Gertrude, and took her every where. That is, every

where Nugent and herself jointly agreed she should go. For there was a compact between them, that Nugent should stay at home whenever he thought proper, and that Gertrude was not to go out more than four evenings in the week. It was only in consideration of this arrangement, that Nugent could bring himself to permit his wife to mingle in the gaieties of a London season.

Wholly ignorant of the customs of the gay world, yet earnestly resolved to carry out his scheme of procuring for his wife a share of the recreations within reach of most young women in her position of life, Nugent had consulted Mrs. Fazackerley on the subject. Not that he had much respect for that lady's judgment or discretion, but he thought she was a very good sample of ladies of fashion, and would give him, as well as any one else, a pretty good idea of the amount of gaiety Gertrude might reasonably expect.

Mrs. Fazackerley instructed him, that she thought Gertrude, considering her husband's own tastes, should give up something to the duties of home. She thought that Gertrude might really arrange to stay at home one evening of the week—"say Sunday evening," added Mrs. Fazackerley, who considered herself rather adroit in thus doing homage to Nugent's prejudices.

"Only one evening in the week!" exclaimed Nugent

with horror, and took his leave resolving to consult some other oracle.

He bethought himself of Lady La Fronde, a matronly person, with very dark eyebrows and a hook nose, to whom Lady Maud had given him letters of introduction. Lady La Fronde was considered a clear-headed woman of the world with great practical sense. Nugent then laid the case before her. "My dear sir"—replied her ladyship, throwing her crochet work into a basket by her side, and addressing herself to the subject under discussion with an air of decision—"My theory is this. Give young people their swing. My daughters never know a quiet evening whilst the season lasts. True, their health is not *quite* so robust in consequence. But what of that, Mr. Nugent? The mind benefits. The spiritual part, Mr. Nugent, is all the better for it. You seem surprised! But the fact is, these innocent follies soon pall. They do not suffice for happiness, Mr. Nugent. No; the heart feels a void. Therefore, I say, let young people quaff their fill of pleasure. 'Tis the short cut to philosophy!" And Lady La Fronde resumed her crochet work.

Nugent took his leave, but was still unsatisfied. More especially as it struck him that the two eldest Misses La Fronde had been a remarkably long time in pursuing

this short cut to wisdom, and, from all accounts, were as far off from it as ever. Nevertheless, so inconsistent are we, that he did not perceive his line of policy towards Gertrude bore rather a strong family likeness to Mrs. Fazackerley's, though doubtless in a modified form. Thus, he returned home as perplexed as ever, but thought a husband's dignity required that he should not lay the whole case openly before Gertrude. So, after much pondering, he went into the matter with rather alarming solemnity, and suddenly addressed Gertrude thus—

“My love, just take this chair by my side. Thank you, dearest. I have something rather particular to say to you.” Gertrude was puzzled and frightened, but did as he requested. “Now, my dear,” continued Nugent—“I wish you to make me a solemn promise.”

“What is that?” asked Gertrude.

“Will you not promise beforehand? Cannot you trust me?” he asked. “You hesitate. Well, then, it is this. All I ask is, that you will promise not to go out more than four evenings in the week.”

“Is that all?” answered Gertrude, and her countenance, which had assumed an anxious uneasy expression immediately brightened, “With all my heart! Four nights a week is really a liberal allowance of amuse-

ment. How kind you are, dear Oliver! Thank you, dear—thank you!”

Nugent, somehow or other, felt a trifle vexed with himself. Why had he not proposed three evenings only? Evidently she would have been satisfied. He experienced the sensation of a cabman, who, having asked sixpence more than his fare and promptly receiving it, accuses himself of folly in not having asked half-a-crown instead. Nugent, however, thanked his wife, and the matter was considered settled.

Certainly, when Nugent married he had no notion of bringing his wife within the sphere of fashionable dissipation. But things were altered since then. He had chalked out a certain line for himself, and he would sternly adhere to it. He would give his young and beautiful wife free scope for a while to consult her own tastes, and follow her own inclinations. She should feel he was no bar to her enjoying herself within reasonable limits in her own way. Meantime, he would ever be on the watch to influence her beneficially, and incline her heart towards better things. Thus, after a time, might be restored to them that perfect wedded happiness which certainly was not theirs at present.

Their income enabled them to live in tolerable com-

fort. Gertrude had her brougham, in which she took airings in the park, paid visits, or shopped.

Very soon, however, Nugent began to find himself more separated than he had anticipated from his wife. Gertrude's personal attractions and lively disposition made her generally sought after. Friends and acquaintances multiplied. Even the three evenings she had agreed not to go out, were scarcely evenings at home. Friends dropped in, invited or uninvited, and dissipated all associations of comfort and tranquillity. Even on Sunday evenings there was a disposition to "drop in." But here Nugent's spirit rose in rebellion. He would have no visitors on the Sabbath, whether morning or evening. He wished to read and think. The world was too much with them even on week-days. So their doors were closed against all comers on that day, and Nugent tried to make the time pass, not merely profitably, but pleasantly, by reading out loud; looking over religious prints with Gertrude; or listening to her performance of Handel or Hullah on the pianoforte.

Sunday once over, in rushed the world again, and Nugent found he must either himself be carried into the vortex, or else to a great extent part company with his wife.

He submitted to the latter alternative, though with some anxiety of mind, and as he often repeated to himself—"Only for a time." The experiment must be fairly carried out, or their coming to London would be a farce.

For himself, it was not difficult to find occupation. He was an active member of an important agricultural association whose head-quarters were in London. He took much interest in a college established for the benefit of working men, and attended, though not in a conspicuous manner, the periodical gatherings of various religious and charitable institutions. At home he set up a kind of amateur workshop in the back part of the premises. He bought a turning-lathe, and studied mechanics.

It is now, however, full time to throw a little light on Lucy Winthrop's sudden appearance at Okenham, related in our last chapter. It came about in the following manner. Gertrude one morning descended into Nugent's work-room, where he was seated up to his ankles in shavings, intently examining a model of some intricate piece of machinery, and, closing the door, she exclaimed—picking her way as well as she could across the room—

"Oliver, dear, I quite forgot on Sunday evening to

“speak to you about Lucy. The poor girl is looking wretchedly ill!”

“Is she?” asked Nugent—“I am very sorry to hear it. What do you think is the matter?”

“Oh! first, I thought it was some foolish love affair down at Okenham, and hoped change of scene would set all to rights, but I begin to suspect she is anxious about her brother.”

“Does not she know where he is?” inquired Nugent.

“I suspect not, but she is always very reserved about him——”

“Then, send her to my study in half an hour or so,” rejoined Nugent; “I should like to have a few words with her about him.”

Lucy, in much trepidation, tapped at Nugent’s door at the appointed time, and having dropped a curtsy, stood awaiting her master’s pleasure.

“Lucy, have you heard lately from your brother?”

The pent-up grief of many weeks immediately broke forth in a flood of tears. She had heard nothing of him this long while, and had no notion where he was, or what had become of him.

“How foolish, my poor girl, not to have spoken to me before! I might have been able to help you.”

“Oh! can you, sir, tell me where he is? And

is he well, sir? Is he quite well, and can I see him soon?"

"Not quite so fast, Lucy. I will write and make inquiry at the place where I last saw him."

"Where was that, sir?"

"He was at the Clawthorp lunatic asylum."

"What, sir?" exclaimed poor Lucy with a look of horror.

"Not, my poor girl, as a patient. I rather think he was going to enter as an attendant."

"How extraordinary!" cried Lucy. "And never to have written me word! It is very strange! May I go to him, sir, by the five o'clock train?"

"Better let me write a line first to Dr. Crayfoot. Have patience, Lucy. I dare say it will all come right."

Lucy withdrew on the whole a little relieved by the interview. There seemed at length to be some clue to her brother's whereabouts, and after all she might soon see him again, and laugh at past anxieties.

Nugent wrote by that post to Dr. Crayfoot, inquiring after a young man of the name of Weston whom he had seen on the Clawthorp asylum premises when he was last there. To this note, Nugent in due course received the following reply:—

“CLAWTHORP RETREAT, *July* 15.

“SIR,

“There is no young man of the name of Weston on my premises, nor ever has been. A man by name Winthrop joined me as an attendant in the place of Spottle, whom you and the visitors dismissed for ill-using a violent patient named Miller. Winthrop had scarcely commenced his duties when he unfortunately fell out of a window and met with serious injury, which I need not further explain, except to state that the man lies in a low feeble state, and I think must be trepanned.

“Your very obedient, humble servant,

“JEFFREY CRAYFOOT.”

This was not a very satisfactory letter. Was Winthrop the same man as Weston? And, if he were, it was not pleasant for Lucy to learn that he was lying dangerously ill at a lunatic asylum down in the country. However, Nugent came to the conclusion, that Lucy had best go down to Clawthorp, and see this Winthrop with her own eyes. He therefore began carefully explaining to Lucy, why in his opinion she should take this course, but was rather surprised to find Lucy was perfectly satisfied her brother was the person meant, and was only anxious to start without delay.

Nugent, therefore, provided her with money, and with a letter to Dr. Crayfoot guaranteeing that all expenses should be repaid him. He also wrote to Lovell to ask him to see Lucy safe off from Okenham, but this letter Lovell did not receive till after his rencontre with Crayfoot, having left home that day before the postman had been his rounds.

Lucy, then, whilst the man-servant went for a cab to take her to the station, hastily packed up her things. She had locked and corded her box, when she remembered the parcel consigned to her charge by her brother on the last occasion of their meeting. This parcel Lucy had placed by permission, as the reader will call to mind, in one of her mistress's boxes. Now, however, that she was quitting the house it might be for several weeks, Lucy did not like to leave it there, and yet feared it might be mislaid if she carried it loose in the train. She was flurried and anxious, not knowing exactly what to do. But, after deliberating a second or two, a thought struck her. There was a dressing-room attached to Gertrude's bed-room, and in it was a small bed and bedstead. Lucy turned back the mattress, and hastily unripping part of the seam of the straw pailasse beneath it, took the parcel out of her mistress's box and secreted it inside the paillasse, covering it well over

with the straw. The dressing-room was used only by her mistress, and the bed would therefore be always unoccupied. But, even if any one slept there, nothing could be discovered. Lucy thought she could not stow the parcel for the present in a more secure place.

But she had not much leisure for reflection. Voices loudly summoned her down-stairs to the cab. She took leave of her mistress in haste and trepidation, fearing she might miss the train.

We may now resume the thread of our narrative so far as Nugent and Gertrude are concerned. Premising that, by this time, Lucy has been nearly a fortnight at Clawthorp in attendance upon her brother, whose condition she described to her mistress as pitiable in the extreme. But more of this by and bye.

There was to be a dinner-party at the Fazackerleys, and a grand ball at the La Frondes. Gertrude, not wishing to tire herself, had remained at home during the afternoon, and beguiled the time by playing over some new music.

Suddenly Nugent, who was reading the *Times* in an arm-chair near the window, exclaimed—

“I do declare there’s that same advertisement again!”

“Read it, Oliver, I forget which you mean.”

“Oh! it’s the one in the second column of the *Times* on the first of each month. Here it is.”

“To G. W—P.—You are earnestly requested to communicate with R. C. without delay, personally or by letter. Have no fear of legal proceedings. Be bold, trustful, and honest. Any reasonable reward shall be yours. If a meeting is feared, though there is no cause, at least write me word of those I am in quest of. You know whom I mean. It will be for your advantage. Address to my house in town. Do not delay. This advertisement will be repeated on the first of each month.—R. C.”

“R. C.!” repeated Gertrude to herself. “That is he, I have no doubt.”

“Why, my dear,” observed Nugent, “you look as if you knew all about it! Pray let me into the secret.”

He spoke at first laughingly; but noticing the blush which, in spite of all her efforts, *would* steal over her face, felt a little annoyed, and added hastily, “Nay, my dear, do not trouble yourself, pray. I did not mean to embarrass you. Far be it from me to extort secrets from you, if secrets you choose to have.”

And he busied himself once more in the *Times*. There was an awkward pause. What could Gertrude say? She had permitted Clinton to reveal to her all his secret anxieties and griefs, and that under the seal of confidence. Latterly, whenever they had met, and

they met frequently, such had been the chief topic of their conversation. To explain to her husband the drift of the advertisement he had just read would have been a breach of confidence, and yet to withhold it implied a lack of wife-like love and trustfulness. She felt that, do what she would, she *must* do wrong. At such times we are apt to feel a rebellious bitterness of spirit in our hearts as if we were hardly used, and were forced by sheer necessity into inevitable sin. Whereas it is we who have of our own deliberate choice fixed ourselves in this dilemma, and are only reaping what we have with our eyes open carefully sown.

There was an awkward pause. Then Gertrude said hurriedly, "Oh! it is merely a guess; I cannot say for certain." And she went on with her music. But was again interrupted by the entrance of the man-servant bearing in his arms a moderate-sized hamper full of fruit and flowers.

"With Sir Reginald Clinton's compliments, ma'am."

"Oh, how delicious!" cried Gertrude, with the ecstasy of enjoyment those only can appreciate who have passed a summer in London after having been accustomed to a garden of their own. And she commenced emptying the basket in a cloth the man had providently brought with him. Heaping up the fragrant pine-apples, the huge

black juicy grapes, the blushing strawberries on one side ; and on the other a multitudinous pyramid of choice geraniums, delicate petunias, fuchsias purple white and crimson, azaleas and kalmias dazzling to the eye, and many more from hothouse or from the open air, filling the rooms with perfume. Their brilliant colours were softened by a plentiful intermixture of myrtle verbena and jessamine.

“ Oh, how exquisite—how delicious !” repeated Gertrude, half-burying her face amongst the heaped-up flowers.

“ It is really very kind of Sir Reginald,” observed Nugent with more sober satisfaction, as he held up a bunch of grapes to the light.

“ There’s some Welsh mutton at the bottom of the hamper for master,” added the servant.

“ Really,” repeated Nugent, “ Clinton is very good.”

“ Take the basket away, John, and send the housemaid with a large jug of water and the flower vases,” cried Gertrude.

“ Where does all this come from ?” asked Nugent, “ Surely he hasn’t such fruit and flowers at Kensington ?”

“ Oh no ! Every thing comes from his place in Wales, the name of which I never can remember.

There's an immense hamper of things sent up twice a-week."

"Why," remarked Nugent good-naturedly, for his displeasure had by this time pretty well subsided, "you seem wonderfully well acquainted with all his arrangements. But what have we here?" he added, as he drew forth a parcel from under the fruit.

"Oh! it's a book Sir Reginald lent me," replied Gertrude, slightly colouring—"Butler's Lives of the Saints.' He wished me to read some portions he had marked for me."

Nugent's countenance immediately assumed that grave, almost stern expression it was wont to do when any thing particularly vexed or distressed him.

"Gertrude, you know I have asked you, not merely as a matter of duty, but as a kindness—a small token of affection towards me—*never* to read popish publications."

"Dear Oliver, this is not a work of controversy."

"It is worse," rejoined Nugent; "it is more ensnaring—more dangerous by far! I thought you would have complied with my earnest request in so small a matter," and Nugent turned to the window to conceal his emotion.

"But, dear Oliver, I really did not know you cared for a book like this. Don't vex yourself, pray. I will return it at once."

"I am surprised at Clinton," said Nugent more mollified; "I did not expect it of him."

"I think you forget," said Gertrude gently, "that you have lent him Protestant books, and given me the names of books to suggest to him. It was that which led the way to his asking me to read this volume of 'Lives of the Saints.'"

"That's a very different thing!" replied Nugent, hastily taking a turn or two up and down the room. "Because I lend him Protestant books, it is no reason he should lend you Catholic books."

"I don't quite see the distinction," was Gertrude's quiet reply.

Nugent was going to urge that the former were written in the cause of truth, whilst the latter advocated dangerous error. But, notwithstanding his strong religious prejudices, this argument stuck fast in his throat. He felt it was begging the whole question. He altered his course with some confusion of manner.

"My dear, you are my wife! He ought not to tamper with your religious convictions in my absence."

"Oh! I assure you, Oliver, you wrong him. He is one of the most conscientious, generous men I ever met! He would scorn to tamper with my faith in an underhand way. He merely lent me this book in self-defence;

just to show, he said, that the Romish church with all its errors and drawbacks, many of which he himself admits, does yet retain enough of Christian truth to convert the heart, and change wicked people into true saints !”

Gertrude spoke with a vehemence that brought the colour to her cheeks.

Nugent, after a pause, replied somewhat stiffly,—

“All I hope, Gertrude, is, that you have no other book belonging to Clinton, or in any ways advocating popery, under this roof?”

“Not a book of any kind—not one !” she emphatically rejoined. “This is the first he has ever lent me, and it shall be the last !”

“Well, then, say no more,” answered Nugent, attempting to look more cheerful—“say no more.”

The entrance of visitors put a stop to their conversation, nor had they opportunity, or perhaps inclination, to resume it before starting for the Fazackerleys.

As Nugent was preparing to hand Gertrude into the carriage a letter was left by the postman, directed in a strange hand, and marked “private” at the top. Nugent hastily opened it, but had no sooner glanced his eye over the contents than his countenance changed. He seemed annoyed and perplexed.

“What is the matter, dear?” asked Gertrude as soon as they were both seated, and the carriage drove off.

“Oh! an anonymous letter—that’s all,” replied Nugent. “Written by some mischievous fool or other. What it means I know not.” He was evidently disturbed, but, after a moment’s thought, handed it to Gertrude, saying—“Here take it, my love, and see what you can make of it.”

Gertrude, holding it to the light, read these few lines, written in a scrawling and apparently disguised hand—

“SIR—I take leave to warn you of a certain Popish baronet of your acquaintance. Keep him at a distance from you and yours, or he will do you a mischief. Do not trust his smooth words or crafty gifts. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*. For your own sake, and for the sake of one you love, leave London, and go where he will not be likely to follow you, or her.

“A FRIEND.”

At that instant the carriage stopped at the Fazackerleys, and Nugent sprang out.

Gertrude was still intent upon the letter.

“Give it to me, dear. I must try to find out who the villain is who wrote it.”

Gertrude mechanically obeyed, and then followed her husband.

"My love," he said, as he took her arm and entered the house, "you ought to have your shawl on. You are shivering with cold. Pray, be more careful of yourself."

"What can it mean, Oliver? Who can have written it? What had we better do?" exclaimed Gertrude.

"Forget it, my love—forget it! It is some mischievous trick. Will you not put your shawl on? You seem quite frozen."

They had to wait a long time for dinner, as a live duke was expected, and it was impossible to dine until he came.

Mrs. Fazackerley took Nugent aside, and, playfully patting him on the arm with her fan, said softly—"You naughty man, you have been scolding our dear Gertrude! She looks quite *distracte* and *abimée*. Well, well—pray, don't be angry. If you scold *me*, I tell you what, I shall scream out loud. My nerves will not stand it."

Nugent tried to smile, but failing, passed it off with a polite bow.

"Ah—I'm sure something's the matter!" resumed Mrs. Fazackerley. "I'm sure of it! Now, you unkind Oliver, don't be cruel to our little Gertrude, or I declare

I shall report your misconduct to a certain baronet of our acquaintance."

Nugent's face burnt crimson, and anger flashed from his eyes. He asked with forced composure what she could possibly mean?

Mrs. Fazackerley was puzzled. Positively the man seemed in earnest. Now, Mrs. Fazackerley had not seen anybody in earnest since that day three years, when driving by the Serpentine one summer's afternoon she had seen a child fall out of a boat into the water, and had heard its agonized scream for help. It gave her quite a turn. She drove home, and took fifty drops of red lavender. Otherwise, as she afterwards declared, "she did not know what would have happened to her!"

So, when Nugent began to look as if he was positively in earnest, Mrs. Fazackerley became uncomfortable. Her mind reverted to red lavender. She laughed hysterically; said she was afraid he thought her very foolish; and changed the subject by asking Nugent to take down to dinner a literary young lady with twinkling eyes and a *nez retroussé*.

The live duke was now announced, and the company filed off and descended to the dining-room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST DROPS OF THE THUNDER-STORM.

THE company was numerous and the dinner protracted. The literary young lady Nugent took down-stairs, was placed on his left, whilst a corpulent M.P. sat upon his right. The literary young lady snubbed him oracularly whenever he made a remark. The corpulent M.P. thought it his duty, as a humble representative of the free and independent electors of Little Fudgbury, to deliver himself whenever he opened his mouth of a series of connected sentences, after the manner of a short speech. So when Nugent was silent the M.P. declaimed, and when he talked, the literary young lady pleasantly tripped him up or blandly set him down. Thus—

Nugent. “The exhibition of the Royal Academy seems unusually good this year.”

Young Lady. “Did you see last year’s?”

Nugent. “No—I couldn’t manage to run up to town.”

Y. L. “Then, how do you know this year’s is a particularly good one?”

M. P. “The progress made by the so-called Præ-Raphaelites in securing popular favour, curiously exhibits the weakness of the human mind, and the force of vivacious audacity. Truly the votaries of sound taste may well shudder at the cancer-like extension of this artistic disease. I for one, sir, though I may be mistaken, and it is open to you, sir, or to any gentleman to prove me so—I, for one, protest in the face of the British public, in the face of Europe, against a barbarous theory, which reduces the finest object in creation to a state of nature, and clips the wings of high art by depicting things as they really are, and not as they ought to be. What then is a Præ-Raphaelite? Why, sir, I for one confidently reply that he is a Dutch painter in a state of insanity!”

Nugent. “Well—I must own that when I walked into the Exhibition rooms this morning, nothing attracted my eye like these Præ-Raphaelite pictures. They stood out with so much strength, freshness, and beauty. All the other pictures, with scarcely an exception, looked by their side soft, smooth, sickly shadows. But these were realities.”

Young Lady. “So you are a Præ-Raphaelite, are you? Have you studied Ruskin?”

Nugent. “No—I have not read a line of him.”

Young Lady. "Excuse me, but what can you know then about the Præ-Raphaelites?"

Nugent. "Only what my eyes tell me."

Young Lady. "But are your eyes educated? Do they carry to your brain false intelligence or true? Are you not going rather out of your depth?"

M. P. "I for one, sir——"

Nugent. "Perhaps I am, but I know what gives me pleasure and what does not."

Young Lady. "Well—*chacun à son gout*. I suppose you prefer bottled stout to iced champagne?"

Nugent. "To tell the truth, I do."

M. P. "The tax on malt, sir, and the duties on foreign wines and spirits, are in the abstract incompatible with the principles of free trade. But yet, sir, how is her Majesty's government to be carried on with an empty exchequer? And how can we better fill that exchequer than by artificially raising the price of articles which are luxuries and not necessities, and which I for one, sir, consider, and which many eminent physiologists consider, produce half the sin and misery in the world?" Here the M.P. paused to drink his champagne ere the effervescence had subsided.

Young Lady. "Have you seen the 'Traviata?'"

Nugent. "Certainly not."

Young Lady. "Don't you like the Opera?"

Nugent. "Not much."

Young Lady, to her next neighbour. "Is my friend on the right a Dissenter?"

The ladies retired, and the men were divided into knots of two or three, except at the upper end, where the M.P. plunged into foreign politics with much animation with a Mr. Trelawney.

"Non-intervention seems to me common-sense, and common-sense is for nations as well as for individuals, the highest wisdom," exclaimed Trelawney.

"My lord," said the M.P., "are we to lock up all the generous sympathies of our nature in the mouldy recesses of the counting-house or the seclusion of the till? Are we to confine our noblest aspirations to the ruled pages of the day-book or the ledger? Are we——"

"It seems to me we have work all round us—we are hemmed in by work—we have plenty on our hands at home. Want, misery, filth, blank ignorance, stolid infidelity, all round us. Why don't we set to work earnestly at home? Generous sympathies, indeed! Our enthusiasm for the welfare of distant nations is like the maudlin emotion of a drunken dissolute husband, who sheds large tears over some hackneyed tragedy at

the theatre, and then reels home to maltreat his wretched wife and family at home !”

The M.P. was somewhat taken aback by this onslaught. Nugent listened with interest. The live duke smiled compassionately. Fazackerley passed the wine, and managed to change the subject before the M.P. had got up the steam for an oratorical rejoinder.

Nugent, who did not intend going to the La Fronde's ball, having arranged for Gertrude to accompany the Fazackerleys, presently made his escape out of the room.

It was now that an incident occurred which, as it had considerable influence on Nugent's subsequent conduct, requires the particular attention of the reader.

Nugent having left his hat in the cloak-room, and not being able to find it there, took a candle from the table and proceeded into a room beyond, to which some of the hats and cloaks had been removed.

At that moment two of the guests entered the outer room, conversing in a careless tone, loud enough to be overheard.

“ Oh, don't you know ? ” said one of the men, “ that is Mrs. ——.” Nugent was not quite sure of the name. “ Yes, a beautiful woman. And so Clinton seems to think.”

“What, Sir Reginald?”

“To be sure! Don’t you know? Oh! it’s a clear case. People don’t talk of it so much now as they did. It’s getting stale. Why, they meet every where! You’ll see them by and bye at the La Fronde’s. He’ll soon be off to Florence or Sorrento, or one of his favourite haunts with her, if I’m not much mistaken. Oh, he knows what he’s about!”

“And that’s her husband, then, that quiet-looking gentlemanly man who went out just before us?”

“Yes, that was Nugent. Poor fellow! poor fellow!”

The men laughed, and taking their hats left the room.

All this was said in a few seconds of time.

Nugent felt sick and giddy. He knew full well to whom the men alluded. Had they remained another second, he would probably have so far regained his presence of mind as to enter the room and show that their conversation was overheard, if not to insist upon an explanation. But the whole passed so swiftly that Nugent could do nothing. They had spoken carelessly. He passively listened, but took little interest in what they were saying. Suddenly a name is mentioned. The clue is given. But before he has time to decide what to do, the men are gone.

Even a man of the world, an *habitué* about town, would not have felt easy under the circumstances. If the words overheard did not make him jealous, at least they would make him angry. But Nugent was wholly new to London life: a man of simple habits, truth-telling, and plain-spoken; careful not to say worse things of his neighbours than they deserved; therefore all the more sensitive to injuries done to his own reputation, or that of those dearest to him.

Nugent's first feeling was one of simple wretchedness and anguish of mind as when we receive tidings of severe disaster. Then came a rush of vehement anger. He could hardly restrain himself from darting after the man who had traduced his dearly loved Gertrude, seizing him by the throat, and compelling him publicly to confess that he lied. The storm of passion which shook his usually calm and steadfast mind threatened to make shipwreck of his judgment. He felt that in another moment he might do something which he should bitterly regret. So, hastening into the passage, he made for the street-door. A servant stepped forward to open it. It was strange, but Nugent could afterwards remember how, amidst all the turmoil of his agitation, he felt an absurd inclination to appeal to this man, and put to him the question—

Is there anything in this horrible rumour? Is there any truth in it? Do you know any thing about it?

It was a morbid longing to assuage his anxiety, such as most of us have felt at one time or other when suffering from the torture of suspense. We feel an impulse to appeal for aid to the first person we meet, whoever or whatever he may be.

Nugent rushed out of the house and traversed the pavement at a rapid pace.

The night was beautiful, and the trees and shrubs in the centre of the square rose up massive and distinct against the starry sky. He crossed the road, and, screened by their deep shadow, paced slowly up and down, lifting his hat from time to time that the fresh air might cool his throbbing temples.

Accustomed to resist the evil passions to which all of us are subject, Nugent gradually grew calmer and reflected steadily upon what he had just heard.

Was there any truth in the story? That Gertrude meditated a deliberate act of unfaithfulness Nugent did not for an instant believe. He would as soon have expected to see the planet shining far aloft above the dark church spire at the corner of the square, fall from the heavens and perish like a fading spark of light.

This supposition he entirely put from his mind. But was there *any* ground for this sinister rumour? There might be, and the thought stung him to the quick. He could not but recall to mind a thousand little trifling incidents, which under the lurid light of a sudden suspicion assumed a significance and distinctness that filled him with vague apprehension. Many things that taken separately are beneath notice, gain strength by cohesion. Mrs. Fazackerley's foolish allusion to Clinton. The anonymous letter received that day. The warmth of manner with which Gertrude defended Sir Reginald that very morning. These were the circumstances that immediately occurred to him when he tried to reason himself into a calmer frame of mind.

Soon other thoughts and recollections assailed him. It was certain that Gertrude and Sir Reginald Clinton had been much together since their arrival in town. Probably they had been together far oftener than he was aware of. She evidently liked and admired him. She praised him and took his part. Then he remembered the civilities lavished upon them by Clinton; introductions to distinguished men; admission tickets to the houses of parliament, to private galleries of pictures, to many places of interest not accessible to

the world at large: even the frequent presents of fruits, flowers, and other luxuries, flashed across his memory. Had he been blind, deaf, mad all this time? Or was he now basely and meanly jealous of one who was a far better wife than he deserved to possess? He would be patient. He would control his feelings. He would pray for guidance and for strength. He would neither do nor say any thing hastily. To show want of confidence where confidence is after all deserved, is both insulting and pernicious.

It was true he might caution Gertrude that slanderous rumours were afloat. This would be his plain duty. But he would do so with calmness. He would keep down the faintest symptom of misgiving. He would treat the whole thing as beneath contempt. He would wait and watch.

Meanwhile, what should he do at this present time? To go back to Fazackerley's was out of the question. He had told Gertrude he should probably leave early; his absence would not therefore be remarked.

Gertrude herself was going to the ball at Mrs. La Fronde's in the Fazackerleys' carriage. And there she would meet Clinton. The thought gave Nugent pain. She would meet Clinton. She would be with him during the evening. The world would whisper, point, and

sneer. He did not hesitate long. He was invited to this ball, why should he not go himself? He would write a letter or two at his club, and then find his way thither.

The ball was at its height when Nugent ascended the stairs at the La Frondes'. The brilliant piquant melody of a new waltz struck upon his ear. The spacious lobby outside the ball-room was gay with flowers, and crowded by elegantly dressed women interspersed with the usual number of men looking as Englishmen are apt to do at the commencement of a ball, preternaturally solemn. There was space enough in the ball-room for dancing, and that was all. Looking into the apartment, you saw what at first sight appeared a wild chaotic assemblage of many-coloured ball-dresses flitting and floating and gyrating round and round each other. Soon you detected the faces of women, some delicately pale, some rosy red, some beautiful, some plain. Also their partners, some ugly and earnest, some careless and conceited, some handsome and unassuming. It was impossible to thread the mazes of this rapidly revolving multitude, and Nugent stood gazing into the room waiting till the dance should terminate. At the further end of the ball-room he noticed an archway leading into another suite of apartments. Meantime he

saw nothing either of Clinton or of Gertrude. One or two of his acquaintances passed and bowed. He responded mechanically, and still keenly scrutinized the faces of the company lining the sides of the room, or flitting in swift succession before him in the waltz. By and bye, however, the music drew to a close, and after an abrupt pause or two, and a passionate semblance of beginning again like a steed reined in against its will, suddenly with a thrilling sonorous clash came to a full stop. The dance broke up, and some fifty or sixty couples dispersed in all directions, whilst servants poured up the stairs and covered a long table in the lobby with ice, negus, and other refreshments.

Nugent now quietly passed into the ball-room, and, after traversing it without success in search of Gertrude, turned his steps towards the inner room. It was richly furnished and decorated. The pure light of innumerable wax candles fell upon choice pictures that clothed the walls; upon alabaster statuettes; upon vases of various-coloured marble full of hothouse flowers. The damask ottomans and settees were mostly occupied by much-bejewelled mammas and chaperones nibbling ice and the reputations of their friends at the same moment, or weighing in a rigid balance the relative advantages of different *bon partis*. Still

no Gertrude: no Clinton. There was, however, a smaller room or boudoir beyond, and thither Nugent threaded his way.

We will, now, however, follow the movements of Gertrude. She was not much surprised at Nugent's non-appearance, because it was frequently his habit to slip away unobserved, and make for home as soon as dinner was over. Consequently, when it was time to start for the *La Frondes'*, she sailed down-stairs with Mrs. Fazackerley and her daughters, radiant with smiles, and in full anticipation of an enjoyable night.

It was a compact between herself and Nugent, that she was not to dance more than a certain number of quadrilles and waltzes, and on no account the polka or galop. Thus a good part of every ball was passed by Gertrude in conversation, and not in dancing. She did not much object, for her winning looks and lively conversation drew to her side one after another all whose society was best worth cultivating in the room. It was this arrangement therefore which had promoted her intimacy with Clinton. He always declined dancing, and thus found himself pretty frequently in juxtaposition with Gertrude. On this occasion the latter had danced one quadrille with Major La Fronde, and was pressed by him to waltz; but, seeing Clin-

ton leaning against the archway between the two rooms, she declined, and seated herself where she could be seen by Clinton. Presently the latter joined her, and, giving his arm, led her to admire the picture of a Madonna in the next room. From thence they passed into the inner apartment already spoken of, and seated on a sofa, the back of which was towards the door, were soon engaged in a conversation that appeared to interest them.

“Have you any news to-day?” asked Gertrude.

“None,” replied Clinton, with a sigh; “none whatever.”

“Was that your advertisement in to-day’s *Times*?” asked Gertrude. “I hope you will forgive me for mentioning it, but I feel so deep an interest in your anxieties!”

“My dear friend, your words of sympathy are my best earthly consolation. The advertisement was mine. It has once been replied to, but only once. That was the day of our last ride—a day I shall always look back to with thankfulness. It broke the solitude of my life, and gave me a glimpse of happiness to which I had long been a stranger. Would that we were in the country once more!”

“Do you then dislike London?”

"I abhor it! More so than ever now, because I feel obliged to remain here. I pine for the fresh air, for mountains and forests, and for the blue sea! Why, the mere sensation of living in London, the stir, the excitement, the variety of objects passing before the eye, stimulates the brain to unhealthy activity! It is more difficult to resist evil, and to do good in London, than in the country!"

"Then there is the more merit if you are successful."

"But do you not feel this excitement?" asked Clinton, fixing his dark eyes on Gertrude with an expression of respectful tenderness. "Do you really feel happy away from the country?"

"I hardly know," said Gertrude. "It is a pleasant change, after all; and it is only a short visit."

"It is too often," rejoined Clinton, "the first drop of what is little better than an intoxicating poison. We sip, we drink, we at length quaff like madmen. Finally, we sink into selfish torpor, and gorge ourselves from sheer habit!"

"But would you have me never mix in London society?"

"Perhaps I shall offend you."

"No. I do not think you can offend me."

"Well, then, I think yours is a mind which were better outside this vortex of fashionable life."

"But why? Tell me why?"

"The physician cannot always confide the grounds of his opinion to the patients who consult him; sometimes he would be at fault to put his reasons into words."

"But surely friends are good for us? And there are so few to be found in the country!"

"Friends! Do you call these unfortunate people friends? Selfishness is broadly written on every line of their faces. Take care of them. Never confide in them. They are not to be trusted!"

"But, then, in whom *are* we—are women, to confide?"

"Those who are your natural guides and protectors," answered Clinton, pressing her hand for one instant in his own; "and, if they fail you, then in One above!" As he spoke these last words, Clinton lowered his voice.

Gertrude regarded him with interest and affection. But at that instant she saw a thrill of pain and anxiety pass across his face. His eyes were fixed on the large mirror opposite to them. Her own followed in the same direction. But she saw nothing there except the reflection of a throng of fashionables fluttering to and fro.

What, then, had Clinton seen? What, then, had attracted and fixed his gaze as by some irresistible spell? Simply the reflection of a face, pale as ashes, just seen for one moment gazing at Gertrude and himself, and then vanishing from sight.

Clinton rose hastily.

“What is the matter?” asked Gertrude. “You look quite changed!”

“Nothing of consequence. I have seen some one I wish to speak to.”

He was agitated, and, as they shook hands, Gertrude felt his hand tremble with emotion. He lingered for a moment, and then said almost in a whisper—

“Whatever happens, remember the words I have just spoken to you. Remember in whom you must trust. Remember on whom you must rely.”

The next moment he was gone.

The instant after Clinton had seen that pale face, which he recognized, and barely recognized, as Nugent's, the dance that had for a time been suspended was resumed. Clinton could only by slow degrees make his way through the room, and by the time he reached the lobby Nugent had sprung into a cab and was half-way towards home.

It was with a feeling of dull, blank wretchedness that

Nugent ascended the steps to his house, and mechanically rang the bell. He had not seen any thing which could justify him in absolutely condemning his wife. A few hours before, and he would have sat down on the same sofa, and greeted Clinton with perfect good will and complacency. True, he had found him engaged in close conversation with his wife. True he had noticed him for a moment press Gertrude's hand in his.

But it was a *tête-à-tête* in the presence of one or two hundred people. There was more of grave courtesy than of passion in Clinton's demeanour. Nevertheless, after the hateful and offensive words he had overheard that evening, the spectacle of these two sitting apart, in earnest conversation, regarding each other with almost affectionate interest, influenced apparently by some common sympathy—this spectacle, in Nugent's overwrought state of mind, was a fatal corroboration of the cruel charge against his wife's fidelity still ringing in his ears. For a moment he had been tortured by a feeling of savage hatred against Clinton; since to a man who endeavours day by day to do what is right, the passion of hatred is nothing else than torture; it is wholly antagonistic to every feeling he labours to cherish and maintain. For a moment he had been thus tortured,

but he had not lost his self-command. He still, with all his strength, kept down the wrath gathering within him. He resolved, and again resolved, not to act hastily, but to wait and watch.

Nugent rang the bell, we have said, mechanically.

Scarcely had he touched it when the door was flung open, and he saw before him, in the light of the gas-lamp—Edward Harrill.

Perhaps at another time Nugent might have felt annoyed at the lad's unexpected appearance, without invitation or authority given, but now he felt differently. Here was some one who cared for him; nay, who seemed to love him. Nugent yielded to the impulse of the moment, and pressed Edward to his heart. Then, as if ashamed of the emotion he had evinced, he thrust the lad away, and asked him, with an ineffectual attempt at sternness, what brought him to town?

Edward hung down his head, and could not at first be induced to give any account of his proceedings. At length, when Nugent had made him sit down beside him in his study, he explained, in disjointed sentences how he had met Lucy at the Manor Farm, and how the sight of her brought old times so vividly before him, that, after several days' excitement, he could bear it no

longer, but wrote a line asking Lovell's forgiveness, and started by third class train for London.

They were still engaged in conversation—for Nugent had many questions to ask about the state of affairs at Okenham—when a loud rap at the street door rudely interrupted them, and brought back to Nugent's mind, with a kind of sudden shock, the recollection of his new and painful anxiety.

He dismissed Edward to bed, and, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, was about to address Gertrude on the subject nearest his heart in the hope of relieving the bitterness of his distress. Suddenly, however, she herself entered the room with an open letter in her hand, and a countenance full of sorrow and alarm.

"What is the matter, Gertrude?" asked Nugent, with forced composure.

"A note from poor mamma! She says my father is very unwell, and they are coming up to town with him to-morrow to get the best advice!"

"Then, he is evidently well enough to travel?"

"Well enough to travel as yet," answered Gertrude, with the tears running down her cheeks. "But it is something very serious. Mamma writes in the greatest distress!"

She was pale with agitation, and Nugent could not

maintain the coldness of manner he had first exhibited. He put his arm round Gertrude, and made her sit down. Then fetched sal-volatile and other restoratives; gently wiped away her tears; and by degrees soothed her into a state of comparative tranquillity.

"You are very kind," said Gertrude, pressing Nugent's hand to her lips, and gazing upwards at his face with a look of affectionate thankfulness.

"Can she be otherwise than pure as drifted snow?" was Nugent's silent question to himself at that moment.

CHAPTER VII.

A. B. X.

CLINTON, finding when he got down-stairs that Nugent had left the house, gave up the idea of seeking an interview with him, at all events that night. But he did not return to the gay scene he had just quitted. Calling for his carriage, which was waiting in attendance, he desired the coachman to drive him straight home.

It was about twelve o'clock when Clinton crossed the threshold of his solitary mansion. The spacious hall, with its marble floor and lofty pillars of *giallo antico*, was bright with the lustre of gas lamps. Yet there was a sense of silent desolation even amidst the tokens of luxury, and wealth, and refined taste which met the eye on every side. The graceful forms of Greek and Roman sculpture, adorning the niches and recesses on either hand as you advanced, gleamed motionless in the mellow light. On the right, folding-

doors spread open and displayed a broad and lofty dining-room also lighted up. Here against the sober-tinted walls hung some choice paintings by Italian and Spanish masters. Their harmonious tone soothed the eye even before the forms and outlines of the picture were perceptible. On the left, other folding-doors, also open, led into a suite of drawing-rooms luxuriously furnished, where you moved with noiseless footstep over carpets that rivalled in texture the softest and richest velvet, and every variety of easy-chair, ottoman, and couch tempted you to rest, and view at leisure the multitude of rare and beautiful objects which adorned the apartment. There was here no gas permitted, but wax lights suspended from the ceiling shed a gentle radiance on the scene. Beyond the dining-room a marble staircase, designed after one in a celebrated palace in Rome, led to the upper apartments; whilst on the left a long wide gallery, containing statues and *basso-relievos*, conducted to a door communicating with the servants' offices. Here, as in every other direction, there was abundance of light; and, were it not for the silence and solitude, you might have supposed on first entering that some great festivity was going forwards. But in a few minutes the very beauty and gorgeousness of the scene, bright with an artificial day, yet so still, so

vacant, so deserted, cast a chill upon the mind. It was like some enchanted palace in the "Arabian nights," or mystic incident in a dream, when we pass through suites and suites of gorgeous apartments, and feel a painful suspicion that something untoward is about to happen.

The owner of this magnificent mansion paid little heed to any thing on the right hand or the left, as he entered the house and hastily nodded to the greyheaded butler, who never allowed him to pass without making him a bow, and who with two footmen behind him flung open the front doors for his reception. Clinton, we say, paid little heed to any thing around him, but walked rapidly across the hall to a door at the end opposite the principal entrance. He opened it and entered a large library, also well lighted, the walls of which were lined with tier above tier of books by ancient and modern authors. He closed the door, advanced to one of the tables on which lay the letters and newspapers which had arrived by the last post, and, sitting down, tore them open one after another with impatience. Some he threw into a waste-paper basket under the table: on others he scribbled a few words in pencil: whilst one or two he locked up in his table drawer. Then with a sigh he rose, and took some turns up and down the room.

“I have been to blame,” he said to himself—“I have been grievously to blame. That look, that gesture, could not be mistaken. I have wounded him sorely. I have carried misery into his home. So it has ever been with me. Of old, persistent in profligacy and vice, I cared for nothing so I secured my own gratification. I was merciless—I was reckless in the selfish pursuit of pleasure. Now, when anguish of mind and body, aided by divine grace, has emptied my heart of its most hateful desires—now, when I have been crushed by long affliction and racked by remorse—now, even now, I seemed doomed to spread desolation wherever I go Doomed? I speak with the folly of a self-deceiving sinner! It is my own wickedness still lingering within, still smouldering in my treacherous heart.”

He paused a minute, and then standing with folded arms, continued, as if addressing himself,—

“Yes, you full well know, in your secret heart of hearts, that you are not free from blame in this matter. True, sympathy is sweet—inexpressibly sweet to a solitary, afflicted man. But did not your conscience tell you there was danger in seeking it where you did? Did not your conscience warn you—very faintly perhaps, yet still perceptibly—that sympathy between you two did at times partake, if only for one instant, of a feeling

more tender and more deep? How know you but that even now you have alienated that woman's heart from the husband who loves her, and who deserves to be loved by her? You will say that this has been far from your wish. I know it; I know that I should have rather perished, unblest by sacramental oil, than have sullied the purity of that sweet creature's soul. But you shut your eyes to the danger. And now the danger is come. The danger and the misery. Let it be my part to undo, as far as in me lies, the evil already wrought. This much at least is clear—we must never meet again!"

Then murmuring to himself the scripture words, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched," Clinton walked slowly across the library, and, opening a concealed door, entered a small oratory or chapel, from the ceiling of which hung a single glimmering lamp. The place was not fitted up with that lavish decoration which might have been expected. It was constructed, however, of the purest statuary marble. The altar rails and the altar were of the same material. One circular window of purple and rose-coloured glass over the altar lighted this chapel by day. The walls were, here and there, inscribed by texts of scripture, or passages from

some of the Fathers in mosaic work. There were no images, only on the altar a crucifix of marble, and behind it an *alto-relievo* representing our Lord's ascension. This latter was of pure alabaster, and in the light of the solitary lamp shone like some delicate transparent shell. A low reading-desk of carved oak stood on one side of the chapel, and on the reading-desk was an English Bible. Clinton, having closed the door of the chapel, remained there for a considerable time. The oil-lamp flickered in the socket, and the first rays of the morning sun fell in chequered colours upon the snow-white pavement of the chapel, when Clinton retired to rest.

On the following morning, Clinton had hardly breakfasted when a strange man rang the bell at the back entrance, and thrust a note into the hand of the servant who opened the door. The butler placed the note on a salver, after giving it a rather contemptuous scrutiny, and brought it to Clinton in the library. The latter received it without much interest, but the butler had not been gone many minutes before the library bell was rung with violence.

"Who brought this note?" eagerly exclaimed Clinton as soon as the butler reappeared.

"A stranger, Sir Reginald; and I may say an ill-

looking stranger. At least so I gather from the information of those who saw him."

The butler spoke with his usual deliberation, and Clinton almost lost his patience.

"But, Harvey, where is he? I want him. Bring him here this instant. This is a matter of importance."

"I regret to say, Sir Reginald, the man did not stay. He immediately went away."

"Never let people go away who bring me notes, Harvey—never! Well, it cannot be helped now. Send some one to Mr. Nutt. Let whoever goes take a cab and bring him here as soon as possible. Do you understand, Harvey?"

Harvey bowed, and retired with a little more activity of manner than usual.

It was not, however, till the afternoon, that Mr. Nutt made his appearance in Clinton's library. He was an intelligent, active-looking man, with fresh-coloured cheeks and large sandy whiskers, dressed in ordinary costume such as a respectable grazier or provincial tradesman might wear. The most noticeable thing about him was a pair of eyes that wandered curiously in all directions, and then, with the rapidity of lightning, suddenly fastened upon the person who was addressing him. He came into the library wiping his forehead with

a blue check pocket-handkerchief. His manner was civil, but by no means diffident or obsequious. He sat down almost unbidden, and, putting his hat under a chair, commenced to explain, that a little business of a "rather partic'lar kind" had taken him right away to the other end of London. Clinton interrupted him with—

"Well, well, I have got you now at all events. This is a letter received this morning. Read it. It is most important. I do believe we are on the right track at last!"

Mr. Nutt took the note with an air of perfect unconcern contrasting rather strongly with Clinton's eagerness, looked round the room with an indifferent air, then suddenly fixed his eyes upon the note in his hand, and read as follows in a guttural sort of voice:—

"The party whom you are in search of is alive and well. But, there's another party who must be brought over before we can make any way. The party I mean is a glutton for money, but I will do my best with him. I think a hundred pounds in ten-pound bank of England notes, directed 'A. B. X., Post-office, Little Mawworm. (To be left till called for,)' would grease the wheels of the party in question. To show you I know a thing

or two, I will just conclude with—"Remember the Palazzo Pitti at Florence, and the flight to Leghorn!"

A. B. X."

"Hum!" remarked Mr. Nutt, with a dubious expression of countenance.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Clinton with some impatience. All that could be extracted, however, from Mr. Nutt, was a repetition of the same monosyllable in precisely the same tone of voice.

"You don't mean to say you think there's nothing in it?" exclaimed Clinton, angrily.

"Tell you what 'tis, Sir Reginald. The matter stands as thus. This here letter may mean a great deal, or it may be a 'do.' That's my private opinion, Sir Reg'nald."

"*Which* is your private opinion?" exclaimed the other in a sort of despair.

"That's for you, Sir Reg'nald, to judge, seeing as all hangs upon this here sort of a wind-up about 'pals' and 'pity,' and 'Leg-horn,'" remarked Mr. Nutt, aspiring the *h* very strongly in Leghorn.

"The words you refer to are very important," rejoined Clinton. "Only a person intimately acquainted with the whole affair could have made use of them. It

is my conviction we are now on the right track, and, unless you see any reason to the contrary, I shall despatch a letter at once to the post-office, addressed A. B. X., place a constable to watch, and apprehend any one who comes for it."

Mr. Nutt, the detective officer, for such he was, glanced carelessly round the room, and abruptly fixing his eyes upon Sir Reginald with a look of the profoundest compassion, as if he was a baby in bad health or a man undergoing some severe operation, ejaculated—

"Oh dear! Oh dear! A pretty kettle of fish, saving your presence, you'd make of it, Sir Reg'nald! Send a letter with nothing in it! Put a man to watch! Oh dear! Oh dear! What would you gain by that move? Why, you'd only nab an innocent country-bumpkin, who'd been sent by some one else who'd got somebody else behind him, and what would you make of him? Why, you'd shut the whole thing up there and then. Oh dear! Oh dear!"

"But what *would* you do then? Shall I send the hundred pounds and see what comes of it?"

"A hundred pounds!" rejoined Mr. Nutt, with a renewed look of compassion—"A hundred pounds! Why, Sir Reg'nald, it will be the goose with the

golden eggs, saving your presence ! These here parties will never be brought to book at all. They will tug, tug at your banker's balance, and you'll never get what you want out of them. No, Sir Reg'nald, allow me just to speak *my* mind on this here matter. You take and write a civilish letter to A. B. X.; a civilish, gentlemanly kind of a letter, and say that you're partic'larly obliged to A. B. X. for his disinterested line of conduct, and may be, if all turns out as you wish, and the party you want turns up safe and sound, may be you'll come down handsome. Meantime, having heavy expenses just this time of year, you can't afford more than a ten-pound note, which you sincerely trust will prove acceptable, and hoping to have a line, acknowledging safe receipt of the same, 'I am, your obedient servant, &c., &c., &c.'

Mr. Nutt, after delivering this animated sketch of the forthcoming campaign, wiped his forehead with the blue check, and appeared to occupy himself in counting the number of books in each bookshelf, and then adding the totals together.

Clinton thought this mode of proceeding rather tame, but nevertheless deferred to Mr. Nutt, who departed—slipping a gold piece into his breeches pocket which somehow or other had glided from Clinton's hand

into his own—and making as he reached the door a parting observation,—

“ You see, Sir Reg’nald, you must first hook your fish. And, when you’ve hooked him, you must treat him as sweetly as a baby, or he’ll slip right through your fingers, nobody knows where ! ”

Then, as he crossed the hall, Nutt said quietly to himself,—

“ For all that, I’ll drop down to Little Mawworm and keep an eye on the post-office, or my name’s not Samuel Nutt ! But we’ll keep that snug. ”

A day or two after this *tête-a-tête* between Sir Reginald Clinton and Mr. Nutt, there arrived at Little Mawworm an individual with a large beard, dressed in the shabby-genteel costume of a third-rate artist taking sketches at watering-places and elsewhere for some speculating tradesman, who pays him an allowance of a few shillings a-day, and then lithographs his sketches for sale in the locality where they were originally taken, at a very pretty profit.

The newly-arrived artist appeared to be enthusiastically struck with the picturesque character of the street where the post-office was situated ; insomuch that, by dint of perseverance, he prevailed on the postmistress to let him a small bed-room by the week, which com-

manded a view of the whole street, and enabled him to take sketches at his leisure, and to the best advantage.

It would have done any one's heart good to see how this earnest-minded artist worked away at the street. There he was, everlastingly at the little bow-window sketching away as if for very life. Now he took one side, now he took another side. First up the street, then down the street. Then he took a bird's-eye view. Then he dashed off a sketch of "Little Mawworm by Moonlight," which quite charmed the postmistress. Then he singled out a broken-down doorway, or rickety chimney-stack, or half-open window with a fat child staring out of it. So he went on till at last it seemed there was nothing left by way of variety except to sketch the houses upside down. But one afternoon, soon after the post came in—at which time we may mention that this exemplary artist seemed always taken with a passion for sketching the face of every man, woman, and child who happened to call for letters—one afternoon he appeared more than usually excited by the beauty of the scene presented by the main street of Little Mawworm. His window, we have said, was a front window. It was, moreover, precisely over the little window with a wooden panel and knocker, at which the public applied for information, postage stamps,

and letters. On this particular afternoon, our friend the artist fixed himself at the window with his chin upon the sill, apparently in a perfect ecstasy of pictorial enthusiasm. Occasionally, when he thought he could be observed by any one below, he would withdraw his head somewhat abruptly, no doubt for the purpose of concealing the intensity of his emotion. He had just partially withdrawn his face from the window, but kept close enough for hearing what was said below, when there comes a rap at the little post-office window. What a start that excitable artist gives! Perhaps he is annoyed at being disturbed. He approaches his head closer to the window, and hears a girl ask in a shrill voice—

“Please, ma’am, be there any letters for A. B. C.?”

“A. B. what?” asked the postmistress, sharply.

“A. B. C.,” repeated the girl in a measured chaunt, as if she was beginning to say her alphabet.

“That’s not it!” said the postmistress, and slammed the door in her face, as if the girl had been saying a lesson, and broke down in it.

“Stupid little fool!” ejaculated the artist, as the girl turned slowly away from the door. “She’s made a mull of it—that’s clear!”

However, the girl had not gone far down the street when a sudden idea seemed to strike her, and she ran

back to the post-office, knocked at the little trapdoor, and exclaimed as soon as it was opened—

“Please, ma’am, I’ve got it now! ’Twas A. B. X!”

Up jumped the artist, on went his Kossuth hat and pepper and salt paletot, and, with drawing-book under his arm, he was in the street in a trice.

Meantime, the postmistress, after some more parley with the little girl, handed her a letter, and slammed the door once more. The girl, putting the letter in her bosom, tripped away down the street, occasionally stopping to perform a solitary little game of hop-scotch on the pavement, with an oyster-shell or a bit of crockery ware. The enthusiastic artist follows at a respectful distance, and whenever the girl is engaged in her peripatetic recreation, appears to take a sudden interest in the outline of the clouds overhead. At last, the girl makes a sudden rush into a small public-house by the roadside, and is instantaneously followed by our friend with the drawing-book.

“All right, mother! Here ’tis. Warn’t I clever to mind the A. B. X.?”

Whilst the girl appeals to her mother for approbation, in comes the artist and asks for a pint of Burton “to wash the dust out of his mouth this hot afternoon.”

The woman puts the letter the little girl gives her in

her pocket, and draws the artist his pint of Burton. He is uncommonly talkative that artist and seems fond of malt liquors, for he has two more pints of Burton and drinks slowly as if to enjoy it the more.

“Nice, civil-spoken gent. that!” said the landlady, as he left the house. “So lucky, too, that he dropped in at the nick of time to address that there bothering letter to Mr. Spottle!”

The artist goes straight to the post-office; says he has had a lucrative offer for taking twenty-four sketches of the scenery round Cheltenham; pays for his lodging; slings his black leather travelling knapsack over his shoulders and starts away for Great Mawworm. Here, however, he does not stay, but gets on the top of a stage-coach just starting for Cheltenham. Then takes the railway, and after some hours’ travelling and stopping and changing of trains finds himself safely deposited at the railway station, Rentworth.

Meantime, our artist has undergone a considerable transformation. In fact, we should hardly know him again. He has left his knapsack and drawing materials somewhere on the road, his Kossuth hat is exchanged for a greasy travelling cap, his pepper and salt paletot has given place to a rough shooting-coat, and he wears leather gaiters and thick hobnailed half-boots. More-

over, his imposing beard has disappeared, and you see a smooth shaven chin in lieu of it. Apparently he is a gamekeeper or groom in quest of a situation, for he saunters down the High Street at Rentworth, and making up to the "Swampshire Arms" in a half-indolent fashion, gradually sidles into the stable-yard, and gets into conversation with the ostler about the weather and the crops and the last Winterbourne steeple-chase, until they both appear mutually pleased with each other, and retire to the tap to have a "glass of summut warm."

What their conversation is inside the tap we do not pretend to say. But, at the termination of this impromptu convivial meeting, the ostler emerges slightly exhilarated with liquor, and particularly affectionate towards our quondam artist, for he earnestly begs him to accept his black terrier Rose and her whole litter of puppies. Also three ferrets, and an old fowling-piece. These handsome offers our friend declines with an air of virtuous self-denial, and proceeds to light and smoke his pipe, seated on the shafts of a coburg cart in the inn-yard, whilst the ostler devotes himself vigorously to the task of washing the wheels of an omnibus in order to work off the effects of his potations in the tap.

Presently a man in very shabby clothes, a battered old hat, and shoes down at heel, with a face bloated from intemperance, swaggers with an attempt at being at his ease across the road, and makes his way toward the tap.

The late artist takes his pipe from his mouth, and says to the ostler—

“I say, old fellow, is that the cove you spoke of just now?”

The ostler, poising one moment in the air the bucket of water he was about to fling over the wheels, nodded and winked by way of reply, and then emptied the bucket with a jerk.

Up got the other, and peeps through the open doorway of the tap. The shabby-looking man asks if there is any letter for him; whereupon the barmaid hands him a letter, directed—

Mr. Spottle,

Swampshire Arms,

Rentworth,

in a handwriting the late artist is pretty familiar with. Then Mr. Spottle, for Mr. Spottle it is, asks for a penn'orth of gin, drinks it off, wipes his mouth with the cuff of his coat, and shambles out of the tap into the street again.

The ci-devant artist dodges him down the street, then meets him as if by accident round the corner, touches his cap (civility costs nothing), and says—

“Beg your pardon. But is your name *Spottle*?”

Mr. Spottle does not seem particularly well pleased to be asked his name, and commences backing into the road as if he meant to make a bolt.

“I’m a poor man, rather hard up, Mr. Spottle, and I wants a situation,” said the other.

“What the deuce d’ye come to me for?” growled Spottle, somewhat reassured by this mode of address.

“’Cause you see, Mr. Spottle, I wants to get into this here madhouse over at Clawthorp as a keeper, and I thought may be you’d speak a word for me, as you know’d the doctor.”

“How the deuce can I speak a word for you, young man,” inquired Spottle, gradually assuming some faint touch of his ancient pomposity, “when I’ve never set eyes on you before this minute? What’s your name, young man?”

“Grub,” said the other, touching his cap. “Daniel Grub.”

“Grub? hem! Queerish name! Well, Mr. Daniel Grub, and so you’re hard up in the world?”

“Haven’t more than nineteen and sixpence-halfpenny to bless myself with, Mr. Spottle.”

“Hem! Nineteen and sixpenny-halfpenny! That’s something—something,” rejoined Spottle, eyeing Mr. Grub with increasing favour.

“And if, Mr. Spottle, you *could* manage to say a word for me to the doctor—I’d willingly—” Mr. Grub here fumbled his cap as if he felt he was treading on delicate ground.

“Speak on, young man,” said Spottle, condescendingly.

“If three half-crowns would make it worth your while to throw in a good word for me——”

Mr. Spottle turned round, put his hands in his pockets, and began to walk away.

“Hope I haven’t given offence?” Mr. Grub inquired humbly, following cap in hand.

“Three half-crowns!” scornfully answered Spottle, “Poof!”

“Well, say ten shillings. Come now, I’m a poor man. Don’t be too hard on me!”

Mr. Spottle’s hand was gently extended, and his eye twinkled acquiescence. But Mr. Grub now held back.

“I say, not so fast, Mr. Spottle. Suppose I don’t get the place, arter all?”

“Young man, a word from me to Dr. Crayfoot, and your affair’s settled.”

“Well, half down and half when I get the place; and, I tell’ee what, I’ll give half-a-crown in for luck. There, now!”

Mr. Spottle’s hand closed like a vice upon the five shillings, and then slipped back into his pocket.

“Take a drop in the tap?” inquired Mr. Grub.

“I don’t mind if I do, young man. I’ll put you in the way of dealing with the doctor. Shouldn’t wonder if I didn’t step along to Clawthorp with you, for I’ve got a letter for the doctor.”

Mr. Grub’s eyes shone for a moment like a cat’s at the sight of a mouse in a trap. Then they walked back to the Swampshire Arms. Here, in the comfortable recesses of the tap-room, Mr. Spottle unbent himself in the most gracious manner. He described in glowing colours the advantages offered by Clawthorp asylum: attributed his own retirement from that institution, not as was vulgarly supposed to any tyrannical interference on the part of the visiting magistrates, but simply to the exhortations of a maiden aunt in the grocery line, who insisted upon his taking up his abode with her to assist in managing a lucrative and fast-increasing business. He magnified his influence over Dr. Crayfoot; finally

producing the identical letter Mr. Grub had directed in the public-house at Little Mawworm, and, dropping his voice to a gurgling whisper, informed him it was a despatch of peculiar importance, and that Dr. Crayfoot's last words were—

“Spottle, there's no man alive can manage this affair except you! Spottle, I depend upon your bringing me the letter without fail! Spottle, give me your hand!”

And a great deal more Mr. Spottle added, which was extremely interesting to Mr. Daniel Grub, but not necessary to communicate to the reader. We shall therefore return for a short time to London, and see how it fared with the Nugents and with Mr. Usherwood.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BREAK IN THE CLOUDS.

MR. USHERWOOD was brought up to London in the express train, and a comfortable lodging found for him and Lady Maud, not far from the Nugents. On his first arrival, the physician detected so much general disturbance of system, that it was thought expedient to send for Agatha and Jessie, at present, as the reader will remember, staying with their aunt in Scotland. For the disorder from which he suffered might take an unfavourable turn.

Gertrude at her father's request removed to the same lodging, and passed much of her time by his bed-side, reading to him when he was able to bear it, at other times sitting quietly by him and holding his hand in hers. Her affection for him was strong, and, independent of the claims of duty, Nugent would not have hesitated to allow her to be with him at this juncture as much as she wished.

The few days which had elapsed since the night of the La Frondes' ball, had sufficed to mitigate the pain and distress occasioned by the remarks Nugent had overheard relative to his wife and Clinton. To this, as we have seen, Gertrude's manner and bearing towards him, seemingly so inconsistent with the truth of this cruel rumour, had not a little contributed. At all events, visited as she was by a sore trial and anxiety, it was now no time to harass her with annoying intelligence, or vex her with inquiries, which, shape them as he might, would probably indicate that he harboured injurious suspicions.

Therefore Nugent put from him all thought of entering upon the matter at present. It must not, however, be supposed that his mind was entirely at ease. It had received a rude shock. He had for a moment realized the misery of betrayed and outraged affections. He had tasted, however passingly, the bitterness of a heart flung back upon itself, and trampled under foot by one tenderly and unreservedly trusted. It was a glimpse of a great sorrow; a new and strange affliction from which many men never wholly recover.

Nothing, however, could be kinder or gentler than Nugent's manner to Gertrude whilst expecting her father's arrival and making hasty preparations to join him at

his lodging. Again, during her stay there, he called twice a day, and endeavoured to give her all the comfort in his power. Gertrude was touched by his sympathy, and felt her heart drawn to him more closely.

Before, however, proceeding further, we must for one moment refer to Lucy, who was still with her brother at Clawthorp. She had written to her mistress, stating that Winthrop remained in a very sad state, scarcely recognizing her, and unable to be moved. She complained of feeling depressed and agitated "in such a horrid place as a madhouse," and almost doubted whether her health would stand it, although she was most anxious to nurse her brother, and the people she believed meant to be kind, "though odd and rough in their ways of going on." She thought she should try to get other advice for him, and would write again soon. Gertrude was rather unhappy about her, and, with Nugent's approbation, wrote to her former governess, Mrs. Grierson, and asked her to drive over to Clawthorp to see Lucy and her sick brother, and endeavour by a little management to induce Crayfoot to hold a consultation on his case.

These instructions Mrs. Grierson promised faithfully to perform the very first day Mr. Grierson's tour of professional visits took him in the direction of the asylum.

One evening, about a week after the La Frondes' ball and the arrival of Mr. Usherwood, Edward Harrill, whose earnest request to be allowed to remain had been granted by Nugent after some demur, was seated at a writing-table in the drawing-room of Nugent's house, engaged in idly scribbling on scraps of paper, and then flinging them into the adjacent grate. Nugent came in from spending an hour or two with Gertrude and her sisters; the latter having that afternoon arrived from Scotland. He caught sight of the crumpled pieces of paper Edward had just flung away, and said rather gravely—

“Edward, remember! You promised, if I allowed you to remain in town, you would not neglect your studies. How can you expect to pass your civil service examination next autumn, if you waste your time in that thoughtless way? Come, now let us have a turn at algebra before going to bed. We have done nothing all day.”

Taking some books from a side-table, Nugent sat down, and pulled towards him the blotting-book Edward had been using. As he did so he noticed that Edward looked uneasy, and endeavoured to conceal a sheet of paper on which he had been writing from Nugent's observation.

“Edward, give me that paper. You ought not to have any mysteries with me. Am I not your best friend?” Nugent spoke kindly, but earnestly. Edward instantly handed the paper to him, but the lad’s compressed lips and sudden paleness showed how great a struggle it had been to him.

“I thought so!” quietly exclaimed Nugent as he cast his eye over the paper. “I thought so! You are trying your hand at another anonymous letter.”

Edward’s face became scarlet.

“Now first, shut the door, Edward, and then come and sit with me on yonder sofa. We will talk this matter over in a serious but friendly spirit.”

Edward silently obeyed him, and Nugent resumed—

“You are fast verging on manhood. In a few months you will be sixteen. I shall not scold you as a child, but reason with you as with a younger brother. You sent me about a week since an anonymous letter. What could induce you to commit so cruel, so cowardly a crime? For crime it is to attempt to destroy, and that in an underhand way, my own peace and that of my wife. I say nothing of calumniating one who has never injured you, Sir Reginald Clinton.”

Edward listened respectfully, almost tearfully, until Nugent mentioned that name. Then the lad’s coun-

tenance changed. He clenched his teeth, and muttered with suppressed vehemence—

“Sir Reginald Clinton is a villain!”

Nothing tries our temper more than a strong statement, corroborative of secret suspicions which we would fain suppress because they are fatal to our peace.

Nugent rose abruptly, and paced the room for a minute or two in high displeasure. Having in a measure regained composure, he approached Edward, and said with some severity of manner—

“Edward, I am pained and shocked at your conduct. In what way can Sir Reginald Clinton have injured you, thus to stir up in your heart such unreasonable animosity? Is it possible that you cherish a foolish unmanly feeling of jealousy towards Sir Reginald, because I choose to regard him with friendship and good-will? I insist upon your explaining yourself.”

Hiding his face in his hands from Nugent’s penetrating glance, Edward hastily considered what answer he should make to these interrogations. He had little besides vague suspicions, undefined misgivings, or hints casually dropped by persons not necessarily possessed of accurate information, to offer in justification of his conduct. One fact, however, there was that seemed in

some degree tangible and distinct. He flung it forth, scarce expecting it would entirely release him from his difficulty, yet hoping it might divert Nugent's thoughts into a different channel.

"I think it very wrong of Sir Reginald," he said, raising his face from his hands, and meeting Nugent's glance with some degree of steadiness—"I think it very wrong of Sir Reginald to send popish books to Mrs. Nugent, for I am sure you do not approve of it."

The shadow passed from Nugent's countenance, and he almost laughed outright.

"Foolish fellow! And is this all? Certainly there is a Romish book in the house, Butler's '*Lives of the Saints*.' It was sent the other day, and in the bustle of Mr. Usherwood's sudden arrival forgotten to be returned. No harm was meant. It was done openly. So set your mind easy on that point."

And Nugent patted him on the shoulder good-humouredly.

Edward looked for a moment vexed at the small impression his words had made, and answered with some animation—

"I do not mean that book only—I mean several books; all popish, and all belonging to Sir Reginald!"

Nugent immediately sat down on a chair near him.

There was a great change in his manner. His voice sank almost to a whisper—

“Take care what you are saying, Edward. Be careful! You do not know what misery may be caused by words spoken without thought—without reflection. Be careful, Edward—be careful!”

The youth was alarmed at the effect his allusion had produced. He hesitated.

Nugent pressed him for a fuller explanation: insisted upon it: would take no denial.

Edward at length replied, and told his tale with honesty and simplicity.

“I saw the books at Okenham. Lucy had them in a parcel, and was taking them up-stairs to Mrs. Nugent’s bed-room. The string of the parcel broke, and the books fell out. I picked up several of them, and turned over the leaves from curiosity. I did not know at the time to whom they belonged, but I have since discovered. There was a crest in the fly-leaf. Two lions’ heads with crowns on, and spikes like unicorns. There was a motto, ‘Dare and Do.’ There were the initials, R. C. Every thing the very same as on the fly-leaf of the book now in the house. Lucy collected the books, made up the parcel, and packed it up in Mrs. Nugent’s box. I saw her with my own eyes.”

Nugent did not immediately make any reply, but sat motionless in his chair. Then, suddenly rising, and bidding Edward good-night in hurried indistinct accents, he pressed his hand for a moment, and left the room. A minute afterwards the street door was heard to open and shut. Edward went up-stairs to bed with a feeling of uneasiness and apprehension for which he could scarcely account.

It was now ten o'clock, and at the Usherwoods' house all was silent and still. Agatha and her sister Jessie, fatigued with their day's journey, had retired to rest early. Lady Maud, who was particular about her health, thought it prudent to retire also; for Mr. Usherwood seemed likely to have a good night, and it was well, Lady Maud observed, to lay in a stock of strength in order to be equal to nursing him should his state unfortunately alter for the worse. At present Mr. Usherwood was decidedly better. Not that the medical men, in their confidential communications to Lady Maud, held out very strong hopes of ultimate recovery. His disorder was one which could only be mitigated, not cured. Still, for a day or two past, whether it was the anticipated arrival of his daughters, or some change in the prescribed remedies, Mr. Usherwood was a different man to what he was on first coming to town. Gertrude

and her sisters, having only heard the opinion of the physicians indirectly through Lady Maud, were naturally more hopeful than their mother. Their spirits rose immediately that the pressure of anxiety was relaxed.

Lady Maud and her two younger daughters had retired to rest. Gertrude alone sat up to finish a letter to Sir Reginald Clinton. The immediate occasion of her writing was a conversation with her mother that same morning. It was evidently Lady Maud's determination to seek opportunities of bringing Agatha and Sir Reginald together, and promoting their marriage by all means in her power. The amendment in Mr. Usherwood's health seemed to facilitate Lady Maud's plans. Already she had let fall a remark that, as an old friend and a near relative of Nugent's, it would be quite in keeping to ask Sir Reginald to drop in now and then and take a quiet dinner with them. Gertrude then sat up to finish a letter to Sir Reginald partly in reference to this subject. She placed the letter, when sealed and directed, on the slab outside the dining-room door; the man-servant having general orders to take any notes or letters he found there to the place of their destination the first thing in the morning. She then ran up-stairs to see if her father was sleeping quietly before going to bed herself.

At this moment Nugent rang at the front-door bell.

Agitated though he was, he remembered there was sickness in the house, and rang as gently as he could. It was opened by Lady Maud's maid, whom Gertrude sent down fearing the footman might make too much noise.

It was opened, but not until a long parley, conducted through the keyhole, had satisfied Mrs. Paine that Nugent was neither a burglar nor a policeman. That lady entertaining a lively abhorrence for both these varieties of the human race, in the one case from timidity, in the other from a wholesome fear lest her character for maidenly modesty should be in any way compromised.

Nugent entered hastily, and desired to see his wife immediately. Paine commenced a reply, the drift of which was that possibly Mrs. Nugent might be already undressed, and therefore unable to come down-stairs.

Nugent cut her short by sternly commanding her to go up, and ask Mrs. Nugent to meet him in the drawing-room with as little delay as possible. Paine instantly succumbed, and, placing the candlestick on the slab outside the dining-room, fluttered up-stairs like a terrified turkey-hen. Nugent, as he passed on towards the room last named, saw the letter addressed to Sir Reginald Clinton on the slab. He seized it as if by a

sudden impulse, and placed it in his pocket. Then, ascending the stairs, he entered the drawing-room and sat down to wait for Gertrude.

It was with a sudden tremor that Gertrude heard that Nugent was below in the drawing-room, and insisted upon her coming down-stairs that instant. Ever since the anonymous letter, warning Nugent against "a certain popish baronet," Gertrude had frequently felt a thrill of secret misgiving—a vague dread of coming sorrow. That day, however, she had been in better spirits than usual. Her father's amendment of health, the arrival of her sisters, and other causes, had contributed to this, and banished the uneasy feeling from her mind.

The summons brought by Paine, and delivered with breathless haste, instantly renewed it. Her face, pale with recent anxiety and watching, assumed a still more careworn expression. She had not begun to undress, and therefore descended to the drawing-room without a moment's delay.

Nugent advanced to her as she entered the room, seized both her hands in his, gazed at her with a kind of passionate anxiety, and endeavoured to speak, but agitation prevented him.

Gertrude was seriously alarmed.

“Oliver, what has happened? Speak to me, I implore you? Do not keep me in suspense!”

Nugent leant his head on her shoulder, and tears gushed from his eyes; such tears as even strong men shed when their hearts are wrung by conflicting emotions of love and anger, tenderness and despair. Gertrude threw her arms round his neck, and strove to soothe and comfort him. Very soon he regained his self-possession, drew back from her abruptly, and exclaimed in a voice of forced composure—

“I am very sorry to disturb and alarm you at this late hour. But I could not help it. My sufferings were too severe. My mind was distracted. I did not know what might happen if I did not speak to you at once!”

Gertrude’s heart beat fast; her limbs seemed to lose their strength; she sank into a chair, and gazed at her husband in mingled terror and perplexity.

“You remember,” Nugent continued, resting his hand on the table as if to assist him to maintain composure, and gazing at Gertrude with a painfully eager expression of countenance—“You remember the book Sir Reginald sent to you the other day. I was hurt at his doing so. Perhaps I was unjust; perhaps I did not make sufficient allowance for him. I was brought up

to regard papists with loathing and disgust from my very cradle. Perhaps I have gone too far. But that is nothing. I must come to the point. Gertrude, you said you never had any other book of Clinton's in your possession except the one sent that day! You promised you never would have! Gertrude, my darling Gertrude, how is it, then, that I hear of popish books, and those too belonging to Clinton, being in your possession? Of course there is some mistake! You spoke unthinkingly, hastily! You forgot that you had other books——"

Gertrude had listened in undisguised amazement to her husband's hurried and passionate appeal up to this point. Now she broke in with eagerness—

"Oliver—dear Oliver, can you doubt me? Is it possible you can believe I could be so base as to deceive you? I never had any other book from Clinton than the one you saw! Who dared to say the contrary? Who is trying to make mischief between us? Who told you I had other books of Sir Reginald's? Who told you I had any popish books at all?"

Nugent felt a sensation of relief. Her energy of manner impressed him. He could scarcely conceive she was not speaking the truth. Yet another kind of embarrassment came over him. He had shown a lack

of confidence in her. He had come to her late at night, and with much emotion beset her with questions as to the veracity of her former statement. And what ground had he to stand upon? What justification for his suspicions?

At length with an effort he answered in a low voice—"I have no doubt there was some mistake. Edward hinted almost accidentally—do not be angry, my dear love, he meant no harm, believe me—Edward hinted that he had seen several of Clinton's books in one of your boxes."

Gertrude started up. Her feelings underwent a revulsion. In the dim light of the solitary candle left by the servants, Nugent saw her countenance change. Passion flashed from her eyes, and brought crimson to her cheeks—

"I thought so!" she exclaimed. "I thought so! That miserable boy is my evil genius! He wickedly plotted against our peace at home. He follows us to London, and pursues his schemes once more. Oliver, I have faults. I have not been all I might have been—all I ought to have been to you. But I am not a worthless, abandoned wretch! I am not utterly reprobate! You have no right to take that boy into your confidence—listen to his slanderous tales—drink in his poisonous

words! It is cruel—it is unbearable—it is enough to drive me mad!”

She sank back into her chair, and burst into a passion of tears.

The emotion seemed real and true. Nugent was humbled, almost crushed. He gently took her hand, kissed it tenderly, and assured her he believed every word she said. That Edward was mistaken. That he himself had been hasty. That he, too, had to reproach himself with many faults and shortcomings. He asked her pardon. He trusted she would accept his repentance, and return his love.

Gertrude was still excited. She seized Nugent's arm, and exclaimed—

“Oliver, the boy is a liar—a shameless liar! Here, take these keys,” she added, snatching some from her pocket and putting them in his hand—“take these keys, and search my trunks, boxes, wardrobes, all that I possess! See if any book of Sir Reginald's is to be found there! See if I have any thing popish under your roof! Judge with your own eyes whether I am guilty or not.”

Nugent refused with warmth. He would not doubt her word. He retracted every thing he had said. He had been foolish, rash. Many things had conspired lately to disturb his mind. Slanderous tongues had

been busy. But his mind was now at ease. He would set the world at defiance. Would she forgive and forget all that had passed?

Gertrude was somewhat softened. Yes—she would do so on two conditions; first, that he would search all her boxes and all her wardrobes; secondly, if nothing was discovered, arrange that Edward should leave the house and never enter it again.

Partly to pacify and soothe her mind, Nugent took her keys, and promised all she asked. They descended the stairs together, and at the street door, after a few whispered words of confidence and affection, parted, as each of them supposed, to meet next day.

Gertrude slowly retraced her steps. She paused outside the dining-room door. The letter to Sir Reginald was gone! “Oh! no doubt Paine has given it to one of the men-servants.” Still, for some reason or other, she had rather it had not disappeared. With a woman’s instinct she apprehended that something more than the affair of the books weighed upon her husband’s mind. She had rather the letter to Sir Reginald did not go. The household were all in bed, but if she woke early she would stop the letter. For of course Paine must have given it to one of the men. Nothing else could explain its disappearance.

She went up-stairs once more. But as she passed her father's bedroom door, the faint tinkle of a bell caught her ear. She entered his room, and found him awake, and anxious to speak with her. He had heard whispers and footsteps below. Who had been calling, and for what purpose, at such an hour?

Gertrude sat with her father until the neighbouring church clock struck one. They conversed together with affectionate earnestness. But we need not intrude into the subject of their conversation. Gertrude left her father in a quiet and composed state of mind, though complaining of a sensation of bodily weakness, which he hoped a few hours' sleep might remove. She herself, soothed by his kind words and honest counsel, and by the prayers they had jointly offered up ere they parted for the night, lay down, not indeed without some lurking uneasiness of mind, but still on the whole patient, resigned, and hopeful.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BURSTING OF THE STORM.

NUGENT had scarcely reached home after his exciting interview with Gertrude, than he called to mind the letter to Sir Reginald Clinton of which he had taken possession. It was the mere impulse of the moment which induced him to seize it. Now, his mind had undergone a complete revulsion.

Certainly there was perplexity, discomfort, anxiety. But there was no longer anguish and dismay. The impression of Gertrude's looks and words was fresh in his recollection.

There must be an extraordinary mistake somewhere. He was loath to believe Edward had wilfully lied. Yet even this solution was more probable than that his own high-spirited, warm-hearted Gertrude should have meanly and cruelly deceived him. There must be some strange mistake. To-morrow strict inquiries must be

made. But, as for this letter to Sir Reginald Clinton, what was to be done with it?

Send it to him as soon as possible. That was the least he could do.

Nugent therefore went up to the man-servant's room, and, rousing him from sleep, directed him to take the letter to Sir Reginald the first thing in the morning.

Having so far discharged his conscience, Nugent thought it time to seek repose.

During the past week, whilst Gertrude was at her father's lodging, Nugent had slept in the dressing-room adjoining his wife's apartment. It was so much less lonely and melancholy than the bedroom. Nugent then made the best of his way to his temporary bedroom. The question however occurred to him, whether, in accordance with his promise to Gertrude, he ought that same night to search her trunks, boxes, and wardrobes, and ascertain whether any such books as Edward mentioned were to be found there. He took out Gertrude's keys and looked at them in a state of indecision. Was there the least doubt that she had spoken the truth? Would it not be more gracious, more generous, to take her word, and make no search at all?

He could not hesitate on the matter. He would not

make any search whatever. He would simply believe her. To-morrow he would ask her not to insist on his keeping his promise. He would beg her, of her goodness and forbearance, to let the matter pass and be forgotten. Possibly she would kindly waive the condition she had placed upon the restoration of her affection. Possibly nothing further need be done.

With these feelings Nugent flung the keys on one side, and retired to rest.

What with the excitement of the last few hours, and the strange perplexing thoughts that ebbed and flowed through his brain, Nugent could not sleep.

Unless great exhaustion of body or mind supervene, slumber rarely visits a man beset by an urgent dominant idea of whatever kind or tendency. Nugent vainly strove to lose himself in dim confusion of thought; vainly struggled to shut out all remembrance of his anxiety. A kind of feverish heat burned in his veins, and imparted irritability to every nerve in his body. He tossed to and fro on his narrow bed, and could not rest.

At length, when a ghostly streak of light began to break the darkness to the eastward, Nugent rose, threw open his window, and tasted the fresh air of early morning; if fresh air can be said to exist in London at all.

Then, returning to his bed, he proposed to make one more attempt to get some sleep. Thinking the feather-bed might have interfered with his rest, he drew the mattress from under it, intending to place it on the top. In doing so his hand touched something hard and solid in the straw paillasse beneath. "What can we possibly have here!" he exclaimed, as, perceiving an opening in the sacking, he thrust in his hand and found inside a parcel of pretty good size apparently containing books.

"What can we possibly have here?"

And, drawing the parcel out of the straw, he placed it on a table that stood near.

Up to this moment Nugent had no suspicion that the parcel was any thing of consequence. He struck a light, for it was still dark, and, examining the outside, found it was wrapped up in a newspaper familiar to him; a county newspaper he continued to take in, although resident in London. Then, for the first time, a slight thrill of fear shot through his heart.

He hastily endeavoured to untie the string that secured the parcel. The twine was knotted. He tried to break it by sheer force, but failed. Then, hurrying to his wife's toilette table, he snatched up a pair of scissors, cut the string, and tore open the newspaper. Out fell

upon the table five or six books, and some other articles which Nugent scarcely noticed. Yes, there was one thing he did notice—a Roman Catholic rosary, with a small crucifix attached. But his chief attention was rivetted on the books.

A great horror crept over his soul. Is this language too strong for the occasion? Let such of my readers as possess imagination put themselves in Nugent's position and conceive what he must have felt at that moment. Many and dark are the afflictions which befall us in our earthly pilgrimage. Tortures of mind and tortures of body : sufferings long drawn out—grief, shame, terror, humiliation, despair. But to recognise in one whom we love, whom we cherish as the apple of our eye, who is a very part of our own soul—to recognise in such an one deceit, corruption, worthlessness—this is one of the most piercing sorrows permitted by Providence and endured by man.

Nugent, then, casting a hasty glance at the rosary, snatched up the books, and examined them as narrowly as the excitement under which he laboured permitted. The first book was a missal; the next was a controversial work; then came two or three French and Italian novels; lastly, some other books of Roman Catholic devotion. All were handsomely bound.

Passages in the latter were marked with pencil, as if for particular notice.

But the blank leaf in each—what was there in it to send every particle of colour from Nugent's face?

Simply a coat of arms—the crest two lions' heads, to use heraldic phraseology “crowned and armed,” and the motto “Dare and Do.” Underneath, the initials R. C.

The coat-of-arms, the crest, the motto, the initials, were those of Sir Reginald Clinton!

How long Nugent remained in a state of partial stupor he knew not. Only as the sickly rays of a London sun gradually lighted up the room, he felt that, come what may, he must rouse himself, must meet his fate as a man, must not sink into childish imbecility.

He rose from the bed on which he had sunk back after examining the books. There was an expression of deep sorrow in his countenance; but it was sorrow endured by a man of a brave and patient nature. Having dressed himself, he sat down for a few minutes and endeavoured to collect his thoughts. Strange to say, it was not so much the fear of his wife's faithlessness to him, her husband, that now possessed him. Rather it was the irresistible conviction forced upon his mind, that she had spoken falsely—that she had coolly and deliberately lied.

For what had she declared? What had she boldly, unflinchingly asseverated? This. That Clinton had never lent her any other book than the one sent the other day—that she had never borrowed, and never would borrow, any other book of him. “This is the first book I have had from him, and it shall be the last!” Those were her words. And she had solemnly repeated them that very night. But now, concealed in her room, he finds one, two, several, popish books, and, what is more, a popish cross and rosary! So she had lied—cruelly and shamefully lied! And she was therefore worthless. Unfaithful to her husband she might be, probably was. Rumour was very likely right. His own involuntary suspicions were very likely only too well grounded. This was most probable. But what matter? The agony of the discovery was swallowed up in an even greater agony. She was intrinsically worthless. A simple lapse, a sudden yielding to temptation, this might not prove the moral nature to be fatally, radically corrupt. But a lie—a lie so wanton, so deliberate, so unblushing—a lie not merely spoken, but acted, for the books were evidently retained in her possession on purpose, and hidden with vulgar cunning where no one would be likely to search for them—a lie of this kind betokened inward ruin, total degradation. She was no longer a being to love, che-

rich, shelter. She was no longer one to pity, seek after, reclaim. She was dross—worthless dross. He would never—never see her more!

Nugent rose and hastily began to collect the books. Amongst them, we have said, there was a rosary. But there were also some other articles wrapped up in paper and carefully sealed. He opened one of these packets, and out dropped a small morocco case. On touching a spring the lid flew open, and Nugent perceived a miniature on ivory painted with much delicacy and finish.

At the first moment Nugent felt strangely perplexed. It was the likeness of a young and handsome man. But the only person of whom it reminded him was the lad Edward. Certainly there was a likeness. But the thought was only momentary. Inside the lid was an inscription in Italian, "*Alla mia amatissima amica*," and written under it were two names partially erased, but Nugent plainly read "*Reginald*." The second name, with the exception of the initial letter "C," was not decipherable. It was clearly the portrait of Sir Reginald Clinton, but painted when he was a much younger man. The likeness could be recognised as soon as it was known for whom it was intended.

With a bitter smile Nugent closed the case, and, fling-

ing it on one side, cast his eye over the other articles on the table.

There was a packet apparently containing letters. On the wrapper was written, in a handwriting Nugent thought he had seen before but did not at the moment remember when or where—"To be burnt after my decease." He paused over this for a minute or two. Then with an impatient gesture put it on one side.

"Have I not seen enough? Need I torture myself any further? Why drink this cup to the very dregs? False in mind, in heart, in soul! False, utterly, irretrievably false!"

Then added—"No, I will not read them now; perhaps I shall never read them. But this I will do. I will keep the letters in my possession as evidence of my wife's guilt. I will never open them unless her conduct force me to do so."

He gathered the other articles together, wrapped them in the same parcel, sealed it with his own seal, wrote upon it in a firm, legible hand, "Mrs. Nugent, No. 50 Upper Grosvenor-street," and, placing it on the table in the adjoining room, prepared to go down-stairs.

Yet he could not forbear to cast one glance of inexpressible anguish round the room. He could not forbear gazing one moment on the many familiar objects reminding him of Gertrude. There was her writing-table, arranged so neatly and with so much taste; there was the blotting-book, on which her small white hand had so often rested;

there were her favourite books, the leaves of which she had so often turned over. There, too, lay the dress of silvery gauze, the gay little cloak, the light and tasteful wreath, she had worn at that last, that fatal ball. It was difficult to believe that all he saw was now part, as it were, of another existence, of a world distinct from his own. Once more, as he left the room, he exclaimed—"No—I never will see her more—never!" But this time his voice was broken by irrepressible emotion, and his eyes misty with fast gushing tears.

But Nugent was soon himself again. It was necessary to follow up the matter. He must see Sir Reginald Clinton. He must confront him, and call him to account. It was now near nine o'clock, and he was about to leave the house when he remembered Gertrude's letter to Sir Reginald. Was it too late to stop it? He inquired, and found it had been taken by the servant half an hour before, but he had not yet returned. Another reason for going forthwith to Sir Reginald Clinton. As he left the house a small note arrived from Gertrude. He seized it, opened it, read it with a rigid, unmoved countenance. It was but a few words, but contained intelligence which at another time would have moved Nugent more deeply. His father-in-law was taken suddenly worse. The powers of life appeared to be ebbing away. The medical men had been summoned. The household was in great grief. Gertrude wrote in a tone of trustful tenderness. None, she said,

could really comfort her but Nugent ; none could better support and counsel her mother and her sisters in that moment of affliction. She prayed him therefore to come to them at once.

Nugent, however, continued his course without hesitation. The park was crossed, and proceeding along the Kensington road, he passed through the massive gateway leading into Sir Reginald's grounds, and advanced with a steady step to the entrance of the house.

Here there was considerable confusion. A general cleaning and dusting seemed to be going forward. Servants and workmen were busily employed in shifting furniture, taking up carpets, cleaning windows, scrubbing floors.

Nugent asked if he could see Sir Reginald. He was told in reply, that Sir Reginald had left town for the country late last night, and it was not known when he would return.

This was a bitter disappointment. Perhaps, however, Nugent might follow him into the country. He asked for Sir Reginald's present address. The servant respectfully but positively assured him that his present address was not known. Letters were to be kept until he sent directions whither they were to be sent. This reminded Nugent of Gertrude's note left at Sir Reginald's that very morning.

He inquired for it, and requested it might be returned

to him. The servant under the circumstances delivered it forthwith, adding he would send word to Mr. Nugent directly he knew his master's address.

Nugent took the note and retraced his steps into the park. He was no longer entirely self-possessed. He could not wholly subdue the agitation of his mind.

"What matter?"—at length he exclaimed, after walking two or three hundred yards at a rapid pace—"She is nothing to me, and I am nothing to her. There is a gulf between us which cannot be passed. Yes, I shall tell her so, and that speedily! To-day her father is in extreme danger. I fully expected it, but Gertrude and her sisters will be unprepared. Lady Maud deceived them. She was afraid to distress them 'before it was absolutely necessary.' Those were her words. Foolish mother! Foolish? Is she not worse than foolish? What might Gertrude have been in other hands? Now it is too late! Let Gertrude do what pleases her best. I am perfectly indifferent to what becomes of her!" And, by way of evincing his indifference, he began planning in his mind the outline of a letter earnestly appealing to Gertrude's better feelings, to be placed in her hands that night. But all this time Nugent held in his hand her letter to Sir Reginald. "It little mattered what it contained! Yet was he not justified in reading it? Nay, was it not clearly his duty so to do? Well, let it be so." And he reluctantly broke the seal and read as follows—

“MY DEAR FRIEND—I write in some agitation, having much on my mind just now. So pray excuse haste and incoherence. Why have I not seen you or heard from you since your sudden and mysterious disappearance at the ball? Sometimes I fear I have offended you. But how? I desire to comply with the advice you gave me at parting, but do not, I beseech you, maintain so strange a silence! One thing I wish to recall strongly to your mind—your promise to show no attention to Agatha. It hurt me to see you with her so much when she stopped here on her way to Scotland. You will say, can I not trust you? But recollect Agatha is young. I believe her attachment in another quarter is deep and sincere; but your own history, so far as I have heard it from your own lips, proves that you possess a dangerous facility of touching and influencing the hearts of all you become acquainted with. I am almost surprised at my boldness in thus writing, but you have asked me to be open. I then implore you not to pain me by these attentions to Agatha. You do not, I know, mean any thing by them. You cannot imagine what my feelings would be if I thought you did! But you may go farther than you intended. I do not know if you are aware of my father’s illness, and his arrival in town. His lodgings are in the same street as our own; number fifty. I am staying with him at present. Pray let not any thing I have said prevent your calling at number fifty. All I suggest is this. *Caution and reserve.* With that proviso

do not hesitate to call here. I need not say how *deeply* anxious I am to hear how your plans progress. I shall look daily at the second column of the *Times*, and I trust to see satisfactory intelligence. It is cruel to wait and wait in the anguish of suspense! But take courage; the time is not perhaps far distant when your perseverance will be rewarded, and you will clasp to your heart—but enough, I must say no more! Believe me, dear friend, as I sincerely feel for your trying anxieties, so in your happiness I also shall be made happy! And now farewell.—G. N.”

Nugent read the letter to the end with unflinching calmness of manner. Yet every word that met his eye, every phrase, every expression and allusion, in his then state of mind, had but one bearing, one signification. That letter alone, supposing nothing else had transpired—that letter alone appeared to him to afford damning evidence of his wife’s guilt.

“*I write in agitation.*”—Well, thought Nugent with something of his old anxiety to be just—well, that might be on account of her father: let that pass. “*Sudden and mysterious disappearance*”—of course his conscience smote him when his eyes met mine, and he fled! “*Advice—comply with his advice!*” What advice? To cajole and deceive me, and throw me off my guard, no doubt! “*Attentions to Agatha!*” Oh! she is jealous—positively jealous, is she? “*I was hurt to see you with*

her so much! You cannot imagine what my feelings would be,” &c., &c. Of course not! “*Dangerous facility of influencing the hearts of others!*” True, too true. “*I am at number fifty!*” How particular to point out where she is to be found! This is infamous, most infamous. “*All I suggest is caution,*” &c. Yes, yes—caution, that is the word. “*With that proviso do not hesitate to call. I shall look daily in the Times!*” They are going to communicate by means of advertisements! Oh, they need not take that circuitous method! I shall not interfere. “*Wait and wait! Anguish of suspense!*” “*Clasp to your heart!*”

“Most horrible! I feel as one in a dream! Can this be Gertrude? Is it possible? Gertrude, so pure, so sweet, once the darling of my heart, the delight of my eyes! Is it possible? Satan as an angel of light! Most horrible! I can read no more.”

Nugent thrust the paper into his breast coat-pocket, and hid his face for a few seconds in his hands. Then casting one long lingering look at the distant streets and squares half veiled in morning mist where that home was situate which he should never see more, he hastily turned and struck into the great thoroughfare leading to Piccadilly.

He had not long pursued his course in this direction when a cab passed at a rapid pace, and stopped immediately in advance of him. The door was flung open, and out sprang Edward Harrill. The lad had evidently

some intelligence to communicate. Nugent stepped on one side with him.

"I followed you to Sir Reginald's," exclaimed Edward, "and from thence tracked you to Knightsbridge. There's bad news. Mr. Usherwood is dead!"

Nugent was shocked. "What, so suddenly? So very suddenly?"

"Yes, sir, there was a great change about daybreak, and the doctors were sent for, but could do nothing. He told Mrs. Nugent he should like to receive the sacrament, so she wrote off to the clergyman begging him to come to them. Mr. Usherwood had just strength to receive it, and then he passed away very peacefully."

"And did you hear," asked Nugent, "how the family were?" adding, with an effort—"Did you hear how Mrs. Nugent was?"

"They were all in great trouble, sir, as you may suppose, especially the two young ladies. Lady Maud was quite calm and collected."

"Well, and Mrs. Nugent?"

Edward walked on for a few seconds by Nugent's side without replying. Then said gravely—

"She too was calm and collected, sir, until I called at the house to look for you, and then she spoke very unkindly to me, and——"

"Go on!" exclaimed Nugent, as the lad paused in his sentence.

"She met me in the passage and spoke very unkindly to me. She said I was cruel and wicked; but she would pray that I might be forgiven, and brought to a better mind. And then told me in a quiet sort of way, but very sternly, that, unless I confessed I had spoken falsely, I should be turned into the streets to get my living as I might."

"My wife! my wife!" murmured Nugent in accents of bitter sorrow. "So young, so fair, and yet so hardened!"

"At least," added Edward, correcting himself, for his disposition was truthful, "she did not use those exact words, but it came to the same thing. I was to be parted from you, and put in a way to earn my livelihood elsewhere."

This, however, determined Nugent in his first resolution to quit London at once without seeing his wife. In the very house of death thus to address Edward, and endeavour to intimidate him into confessing himself a liar, to screen herself from Nugent's just displeasure; this argued a degree of shameless depravity which it was vain to grapple with. The cup of despair was filled to the brim.

Nugent turned abruptly to Edward and exclaimed—

"I suppose I was inquired for?"

"Oh yes, sir! Every body was asking for you."

"Very good! Now, take a cab, Edward, and return to my house. Pack a few things in my portmanteau,

my dressing things and a change of linen ; you know what I require. Do not forget my writing-desk and the Bible in my study ; also, Edward, there is a parcel tied up and sealed upon the table in my wife's bedroom. Put that carefully into the portmanteau. Pack up your own things. Follow me to my club as soon as you can. If any questions are asked, answer simply that I shall write to Mrs. Nugent in the course of the day."

Edward hailed a cab and was soon out of sight. He obeyed Nugent's instructions implicitly, and in the course of an hour or so, arrived with the luggage at the club, where Nugent was awaiting him. From the club they drove into the city. Here Nugent was all the afternoon transacting business with his lawyer. Part of this business related to his wife. He left in the lawyer's hands the packet of books, directing that, after the lapse of a few days, it should be forwarded to Mrs. Nugent, together with a letter of some length, which he had written to her at his club. He did not wish at such a moment to create scandal and disturbance in the family, or augment the severity of their sorrow. Therefore he wrote to Gertrude that day only a brief note, stating that a matter of great moment to his peace obliged him to leave home ; and promising she should hear from him fully before the end of the week. This he thought would sufficiently indicate to Gertrude the cause of his departure, yet not occasion to the rest of the family any extraordinary uneasiness. For they

would probably put any other construction upon it than the true one.

Having completed other business which called for attention before carrying his present plans into operation, he took some refreshment with Edward at the nearest coffee-house, having scarcely tasted food since the day before, and then drove in the direction of Paddington station.

CHAPTER X.

THE FUNERAL.

THE shutters of number fifty in Upper Grosvenor Street were for the most part closed. Here and there a chink was left open to admit a ray of light. In the dining-room greater latitude was allowed, and the upper part of the shutters wholly thrown open.

For here were assembled, in dreary conclave, the friends and relations invited to Mr. Usherwood's funeral.

There was Jonathan Usherwood, a younger brother of the deceased, of the firm of Whiffles and Usherwood. It was impossible to avoid inviting him, although Lady Maud had some qualms on the subject, especially as Jonathan Usherwood made a pointed request that he might bring his personal friend and partner in the business, Whiffles, anxious to show respect to the former head of the firm, and could not well be refused.

Lady Maud had some qualms, and no wonder. The Honourable Jacques Delafield had accepted an invitation to the funeral, and his feelings might be hurt at coming in contact with a real undisguised man of busi-

ness from the city. The Honourable Jacques Delafield was a first cousin of Lady Maud's, and a lineal descendant of the celebrated Countess of Delafield, of whom mention has been made in an early part of this narrative. The Honourable Jacques Delafield was an elderly man of very gentlemanly bearing, but decidedly broken down and shaky. He carried a gold-headed cane, and occasionally took snuff from a small richly-carved snuff-box, presented to him by a German prince in gratitude for a new recipe for dressing salad. Delafield had a very aristocratic look about him. In fact, whenever he went to a new watering-place, tradesfolk and others always set out with calling him "my lord," and, as he never corrected them, continued to do so till set right by some well-meaning person, ambitious to exhibit his superior information. Whereupon, the Honourable Jacques Delafield was pretty sure to change his tradespeople within twenty-four hours at furthest.

Another of the mourners was Colonel Roundelay, who was little changed from what he was three years before, on the eve of Gertrude's marriage.

Dr. Vamp, the physician, and the Rev. Frederick Steadman, rector of the parish, who had been very kind to the deceased as well as to Lady Maud and the family, composed the remainder of the party.

The first stiffness had a little worn off. Tea and coffee were handed round, and a desultory conversation, in that low tone of voice usual on such occasions, was

maintained by the doctor in one corner of the room, and by Colonel Roundelay in another. Whiffles, who had sat preternaturally solemn and bolt upright in his chair ever since he had entered the room, took courage, and before Mr. Jonathan Usherwood, who made a desperate dart at his coat-tails, could stop him, seated himself in a chair at the table where various refreshments were set out more for show than for use, and remarking that "good people were scarce," stuck his fork into a larded turkey, and, bending towards Delafield, who was stroking his chin with the handle of his cane, inquired—"Whether his lordship wouldn't have a taste of it? For, for his part, he always thought that sorrow was not only thirsty, but hungry into the bargain."

The Honourable Jacques Delafield shuddered as if he had been invited to partake in an act of cannibalism, but, soothed by the compliment of "my lord," answered with great affability that he had really rather not.

Colonel Roundelay, slightly raising his voice that Delafield might hear, for he thought he was evincing much praiseworthy zeal in setting Whiffles right, exclaimed—

"Excuse me, Mr. Whiffles, but, between you and me, Mr. Delafield is not a 'lord!' Honourable, if you like; but no lord, Whiffles—no lord! no, no!"

The Honourable Mr. Delafield took snuff with deliberation, and then looked at the colonel for about three seconds, as if he thought he was some specimen of hu-

man nature more curious than agreeable freshly imported from beyond the seas.

Meanwhile, Whiffles sat with his fork stuck upright in the turkey, and his lips wide apart, looking from one person to the other in the hope of being asked to carve it.

Good-natured Mr. Steadman had the moral courage to take a chair at the table, hold out his plate for a slice, and relieve Whiffles from his embarrassment. The moment he did so, Jonathan Usherwood plunged heavily into an arm-chair at the other end of the table, and, slightly turning back the cuffs of his coat, commenced carving a fillet of veal as if surrounded by a pic-nic party of forty, all clamouring to be helped. Colonel Roundelay, after a little hesitation, also pushed his chair to the table. But Dr. Vamp, with a slightly supercilious smile, and shaking an odour of *millefleurs* from his white pocket-handkerchief, withdrew further from the table, and, approaching Delafield with marked deference in his manner, sat down at the extremity of the sofa occupied by that elderly aristocrat, and asked him, "Whether the report was true, that 'Bee in a Bonnet' had been backed yesterday for the Derby at two to one?"

Delafield replied with suavity—"That the Duke mentioned some such thing at the Carlton that morning. But he never went to Tattersall's himself. Betting excited his brain too much. The Delafields had been always excitable. It was the same, my dear doctor, with my

late lamented grandmother, Lady Delafield. She was excitable! I will tell you an anecdote about her. Once upon a time she detected a spider in the folds of her handkerchief. Much agitated, but with great presence of mind, she rang the bell. Her maid appeared. ‘Jemima, in this handkerchief you will find a spider. Put it out of its misery down-stairs. I cannot destroy it here, for it makes a disagreeable mess when crushed.’ Such was Lady Delafield! A woman full of the most delicate sensibility! And so am I! If I won a bet of a man of small means, the spectacle of his anguish would upset me. I must be paid through a banker, and then my mind is easy. But some poor devils insist upon handing over the cash face to face, and that is torture to me—positively torture!”

Meantime, Whiffles had made a tremendous inroad into the turkey, and was drinking sherry with each of the gentlemen round in succession. Of course, every thing was quiet and decorous; but, despite all precaution, there was an air of smothered conviviality hovering over the company, not quite in harmony with funereal propriety.

“Do these people disturb you, Mr. Delafield?” asked Dr. Vamp, in a whisper soft as silk.

“Not much. I bend, my dear doctor, like a reed to the storm, and it whistles over me without doing me any hurt. If I resisted it, total collapse would follow.”

“Ah, sir!” exclaimed Dr. Vamp with gentle enthu-

siasm, "you are a philosopher, nothing more nor less!"

At this juncture Whiffles, cheered by his repast and influenced by the best intentions, called out from the other end of the table—

"My Lord—I beg pardon—Mr. Delafield I should have said, let me urge you to throw in a little solid food. You will find Kensall Green coldish this morning, I can tell you. I am sure your cousin, my good friend Dick Usherwood, now deceased, would take it quite amiss if the mourners faced the east wind on an empty stomach!"

The Hon. Jacques Delafield took a pinch of snuff. The doctor lifted his eyebrows. Colonel Roundelay, bending forward to Mr. Steadman, the rector, said—

"Ah, Mr. Whiffles, it is a thousand pities Richard Usherwood did not remain in the business! What a help you would have had in Lady Maud! Why, she would have been the making of your firm!"

"Ay, ay!" exclaimed conjointly Mr. Whiffles and Jonathan Usherwood—"Ay, ay!"

"Pleasing thing, Mr. Steadman," added the colonel "to see the upper and middle classes blending harmoniously together! Is it not now? Look at the Usherwoods and the Delafields! What a highly honourable combination!"

The Rev. Frederick Steadman, perceiving that the Hon. Jacques Delafield appeared to be partially petrified

by this outburst, now thought it time to change the subject—

“I was happy to find,” he said, addressing Jonathan Usherwood, “the young ladies, your nieces, tolerably composed this morning. Daughters feel the loss of a father so acutely.”

“Hah!” interposed Colonel Roundelay—“Hah! But poor Mrs. Nugent! Only think of poor Mrs. Nugent! Hah! there’s twofold affliction for you! Father and husband gone! Truly, Mr. Rector, this is a strange world! It seems but yesterday I was at her wedding. And now—well, well!”

The colonel, admonished by the rector’s frowns, paused abruptly, and helped himself to more sherry. The fact being, that the disappearance of Nugent under painful circumstances, although extremely well known, was by common consent a *tabooed* topic, an ugly sort of mystery, better avoided than investigated.

All the company sat for a moment in painful embarrassment. Even the Hon. Jacques Delafield forgot himself so far as to take an extra large pinch of snuff, and sneezed with plebeian emphasis into his hastily raised handkerchief. Jonathan Usherwood growled between his teeth, that some one or other had treated his dear little niece like a brute. The doctor caressed the calf of his left leg, which was gracefully crossed over his right knee, and observed *sotto voce* to Delafield,

that "Mrs. Nugent was much to be pitied, but what could you expect from a farmer?"

Delafield raised a white hand in a deprecating manner, and exclaimed—

"The individual you refer to, though devoted to low pursuits, has good blood in his veins, my good doctor, and comes of an old family. Maud assures me, and she has a talent for tracing pedigrees, that he is descended from Sir Somebody What's-his-name, who murdered the young princes in the Tower, *circa* 1483."

"Well, that's in his favour," rejoined the doctor, whilst something like a smile quivered in the corner of his mouth farthest from Delafield.

But at this juncture an unfortunate blunder, perpetrated by Colonel Roundelay, threw the whole room into dire confusion. So sad a circumstance as a downright violent quarrel occurring at a funeral breakfast, in the very presence of and hearing of the Hon. Jacques Delafield—nay, a quarrel, in which that distinguished aristocrat was actually and bodily one of the chief parties implicated, deserves particular consideration at our hands, and, to render it perfectly clear to our readers, we must adopt for the nonce something of the dramatic form of representation.

The Rev. Frederick Steadman, thinking to submit to the company a quiet, harmless, rather edifying topic of conversation, remarked, that their worthy friend the deceased was, to the best of his, the Rev. F. Steadman's

belief, "fully prepared for the great change, and died as a Christian should die."

Colonel Roundelay (elated to find himself on safe ground again).—"Precisely what I should have expected, Mr. Rector—precisely! He was a man, take him for all in all, we ne'er shall look upon his like again! He was emphatically a man! Ay, sir, a man. One of nature's noblemen. What is it Burns says? Let me see—let me see—

'D'ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord,
Wha struts an' stares an' a' that?'

Whew! Mr. Rector, your legs are long! Are you aware you kicked my shin?

'For a' that, an' a' that—'

Oh dear, my memory's like a sieve! Stop, I have it!
(*in a rollicking voice,*)

'The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that!'

The Hon. Jacques Delafield (starting to his feet with the aid of his gold-headed cane).—"Confound it, sir, d'ye mean to insult me? D'ye know who I am, sir—eh, sir?"

The company rose simultaneously in a paroxysm of consternation. After a moment's distressing silence—

The Rector.—"Gentlemen, I beg—Mr. Delafield, pray remember on what occasion we are met!"

Colonel Roundelay (tingling with horror from the

crown of his head to the sole of his feet).—"Bless me, I beg ten thousand pardons, Mr. Delafield. Really, now, I am very sorry—meant no offence—really, now."

The Hon. Jacques Delafield.—"Sir, you shall hear from me again on this matter! What, sir? Eh, sir?"

Jonathan Usherwood.—"The colonel meant no offence, Mr. Delafield; I'll be sworn he didn't!" Then, nudging the colonel, "Speak up, colonel—speak up! say you are deuced sorry, and all that sort of thing."

Whiffles (apostrophizing to himself).—"Oh dear! oh dear! Here's a game!"

The rector, unable to quell the storm by a direct interposition, now tried a diversion, exclaiming, "Gentlemen, the hearse! Gentlemen, the hearse and carriages are drawing up at the door!"

This produced a lull; and, finally, a patched-up peace was contracted between the colonel and his incensed antagonist. But the Hon. Jacques Delafield solemnly swore in the ear of Dr. Vamp, who all this time had been watching, with much quiet interest, the play of feature exhibited in the countenances of those present during the recent *emeute*,—that he would never attend any other funeral; never, never, never!

"There's one you must attend," thought the doctor, as he examined the other's countenance with professional acumen—"there's one you must attend, and that before many years are over."

The entrance of undertakers bearing armfuls of black

crape, long cloaks, and all the customary paraphernalia of fashionable funerals, put a decisive stop to all further altercation.

At nearly the same moment a parcel of tolerable size was brought down the area steps by a seedy-looking individual with a pale face, in rusty black apparel. The cook was at first shocked at the intrusion at such a time, "With the mutes at the front door, too! It was uncommon like profanity, that it was!" But Paine's eye detected the handwriting of the address to be "Squire Nugent's," and clutched it eagerly. Then revelling in the momentary sense of importance acquired by being the bearer of something in the shape of intelligence, mounted up-stairs with wonderfully greater alacrity than usual, and carried the parcel straight into Gertrude's room, "making bold," as she expressed herself, "so to do, seeing it was from Mr. Nugent's solicitor in the city."

Gertrude started from the sofa where she was lying, and, seizing the parcel, commenced cutting the string. At the same time declining Paine's offer of assistance, and desiring her, with unusual vehemence of manner, to leave the room instantly.

The parcel was opened. The books with which the reader is already familiar met her bewildered gaze. The miniature followed. Attached to the parcel was a letter from Nugent himself.

It was as follows:—

“GERTRUDE,

“I wrote a few lines to you on the day of your poor father’s decease. I feared my sudden departure might harass and disturb the family. When I inform you, that I discovered the books and other articles now returned to you the very morning after our last conversation, you will understand why I left you even in your affliction, and why I cannot and will not return to you.

“God knows what anguish wrings my heart whilst I write this! You are doubtless calm and contented. Yet let me, ere we start forth in our separate paths, never probably to meet again; let me, once and for all, put before you what has passed during these last few days in a distinct shape, so that you may effectually realise every part of it.

“Now, listen. The night we dined at the Fazackerleys, I heard—against my will—two men, fellow-guests with ourselves, discuss my wife’s conduct in connection with one I need not name. Their words stabbed me to the heart.

“But I did not mistrust my wife. My love did not falter. I thought, at the worst, she had been imprudent.

“I followed you the same night to the La Frondes’ ball. There, after a long search, I found you seated by the side of the man with whom I had heard your name coupled. You were retired from public view. He

took your hand in his. At that moment, in the mirror opposite to you, his eyes met mine. For I was standing behind you. Shame and alarm were written on every line of his countenance!

“But even then I did not falter in my love to my wife. I did not dream of casting her from me.

“When trouble fell upon you, I succoured and comforted you as of old.

“What, then? It came to my ears—no matter how—that you had under my roof books belonging to that man—books you had solemnly assured me never were in your possession. In deep anxiety, I questioned you face to face. You denied with frank and honest warmth. Touched by your earnestness, I loyally believed every word you uttered. You gave me your keys, and insisted I should search your boxes. Of course there was nothing there to criminate you! Nothing. But by a mere accident, or rather by the decree of Providence, I found the parcel in the room adjoining yours. One by one I drew out the books, the popish rosary, the miniature of that man, the packet of letters ‘to be burnt after my decease.’ Does your conscience touch you *now*? Will that imperturbable coolness, inherited from your unscrupulous mother, so successfully employed to blind the eyes of a weak and foolish husband who loved you only too well—will that imperturbable coolness at length begin to waver? Or, will you dare to brave it out? Did you not tranquilly gaze in my

face but a fortnight since, and declare that the 'Lives of the Saints' was the *first* book belonging to that man you had had in your possession, and that it should be the *last*? Did you, or did you not?

"Did you not repeat—solemnly and passionately repeat—the same tale, the night of our last meeting?

"Now, shall I tell you my mind plainly in this matter? The lie you have told—the cruel heartless lie—has severed our hearts for ever! One who could commit so infamous a crime as this, could commit any thing—any thing under the sun!

"Yet, even then, beaten down as I was to the very dust, I hoped that you were not utterly lost. I went to that man's house to denounce him to his face, tax him with his villainy, and it may be ascertain something—something, however trifling, in mitigation of your wickedness. He had fled from London. Doubtless he expected I should seek him. But that day brought a miserable corroboration of my worst fears. The letter, Gertrude—the letter you wrote to him! Reflect what must have been the feelings of a husband who with all his deficiencies loved you so tenderly, when he saw your guilt, your shame, your utter corruption of soul traced deliberately, line by line, by your own hand!

"Oh, what hideous havoc has crime wrought in a soul once so pure and so lovely!

"But, enough! Why do I weakly, fondly strive to

touch a heart that must be harder than marble? All I can do is to pray for you. That I shall never cease to do, morning and night.

“Whither I go from hence matters little to you. Yet, before I leave this country, I shall probably write to you once more. I would fain save you from destruction, though nothing can ever restore you to the place in my heart you once occupied.

“For the rest, my house and the half of my income shall be yours if you return to Okenham forthwith. My property is placed in the hands of trustees who will aid my efforts to rescue you from the clutches of that hypocritical profligate.

“And now, a long farewell! May He who alone has the power, awake you to a true sense of your condition, and save you from the wrath to come!

“OLIVER NUGENT.”

The poor young woman devoured the contents of this letter with a countenance ghastly from terror, surprise, and perplexity.

She turned over the books, examined the miniature, the rosary; seized up the letter once more, glanced over the more important passages with glazed and tearless eyes; threw it aside, and once more spread open on the table all that the parcel contained. Then, stunned by the strange, incomprehensible calamity that had come upon her, sank upon the floor, and sat silent and mo-

tionless, endeavouring to collect her thoughts, and decide what she ought to do.

The maid, who had waited outside the door, knocked, and hearing no answer, entered the room with an expression of countenance in which fear had conquered curiosity.

Gertrude motioned her away with an impatient wave of the arm.

In the mean time, the chief undertaker was equipping and marshalling the mourners down-stairs. Jonathan Usherwood and his aristocratic connection, the Hon. Jacques Delafield, moved out first, clad in their dismal cloaks and rustling crape, and seated themselves in the mourning coach drawn up in front of the house. The coffin had just been borne past, and with grating sound lodged in the stately hearse that headed the procession. Jonathan was a good, warm-hearted sort of man. He rubbed his eyes with a large white silk pocket-handkerchief, and turned very red in his efforts not to show signs of what might be called womanly weakness. The Hon. Jacques Delafield was also flushed in the face, but in his case from partially appeased indignation, not from grief. Whiffles and Colonel Roundelay, having composed their countenances to a solemn expression, followed, and made towards the next carriage. Behind were the rector and Dr. Vamp. The face of the latter was pervaded by a soft delicate sneer that did not materially impair the decorous expression of his

countenance. He had been profoundly amused by the recent altercation in the dining-room.

In the back part of the passage some one was sobbing and crying like a child. It was not any of the lady members of the family, for they were all up-stairs in their rooms. It was William, Mr. Usherwood's butler. The undertaker scolded him, and said unless he kept quiet he should not allow him to attend the funeral. It was vulgar, it was coarse, it was going a great deal too far, and would spoil the whole thing!

At that moment, after the carriage occupied by Whiffles and the colonel had slowly moved on, and whilst Mr. Steadman and the doctor were on the point of issuing from the house to ascend the last one, two or three of the female servants came rushing down-stairs, exclaiming in accents of smothered alarm—

“Doctor, doctor, you are wanted up-stairs! Mrs. Nugent is very ill!”

The doctor turned quietly, listened to what the women said, and then, stepping back into the passage, very composedly began to take off his funeral attire preparatory to obeying the summons.

Bland the undertaker sprang forwards in an agony.

“Doctor Vamp, this is impossible! You must not leave us, Doctor Vamp! You cannot leave us, Doctor Vamp! Who is to support the rector? The thing is impossible! You will destroy the symmetry of the ceremony!”

"But my young mistress is very ill, sir!" now exclaimed in honest wrath one of the housemaids who had known Gertrude from a child. "The doctor *must* go to her—he *shall* go to her, sir!"

Bland gesticulated with subdued but convulsive vehemence; implored the doctor to have some regard to decency; protested that the funeral would be a scandal to the town if the rector was unsupported. Finally, began to foam at the mouth in his endeavours to be at one and the same time impressive and yet dignified.

The doctor entirely ignored every single word Bland uttered, and proceeded to remove the crape from his hat. Bland wrung his sable hands in anguish too deep for utterance.

At that moment from the upper part of the stairs a voice was heard, calm and stern as of one suffering from affliction, but determined not to give way—

"Tell Doctor Vamp, with my compliments, that I particularly wish he should attend the funeral. I have no wish to see him."

It was Mrs. Nugent's voice.

The doctor quietly replaced the crape, and without the smallest change of countenance followed the rector, and disappeared in the carriage.

Bland, with a triumphant smile puckering his countenance, rushed in pursuit. The mutes swarmed out of the door. William the butler, still sobbing in a most indeco-

rous manner, accompanied by two or three of the other servants, brought up the rear.

The hearse moves on with nodding plumes. The whole procession follows. The boys in the street shouted, and tried to peep into the carriage windows. The old sweeper at the crossing leant upon his broom and grinned vacantly as the pageant passed. Bland was in his glory, and the street door closed upon the living and the dead.

Not many minutes after, Lady Maud and Gertrude are in earnest conversation in the drawing-room. The one is seated and holds a letter in her hand, on which she gazes in apparent astonishment. The other stands upright before her in the rigid attitude of one struggling with a great sorrow. Her face ashy pale; her features swollen; her beautiful eyes strained and blood-shot. None but her intimate friends would have recognised her.

After one or two exclamations of surprise and vexation, Lady Maud placed the letter in her bosom, and hastily rising took Gertrude's cold hands in hers, and looking steadily into her face, said—

“Darling, you have always placed confidence in me; you know that, whatever may be the truth of this strange story, I shall be the same as ever to you. Now, tell me—for this is absolutely necessary for my guidance—tell me, are you guilty or not guilty?”

“Yes and No!” was Gertrude's reply, in a voice that

had lost its sweetness under the pressure of sudden grief. "Yes and No! Innocent, so help me heaven, of the crime of which he suspects me—innocent as a babe unborn! But guilty of another crime. Guilty of cruel indifference and long neglect towards a husband who deserved the worship of my whole heart."

"Good!" rejoined Lady Maud. "That point settled, I shall be able to see my way a little better."

"As for the books and other things up-stairs, I know nothing of them. I never set my eyes on them before!"

"Can you in any way explain, darling, how they came into your house—into your room?"

"Two thoughts have occurred to me," answered Gertrude. "Either the parcel has been secreted in my room by some one desirous to do me harm—and I can think of no one capable of such sentiments save Edward Harrill—or else it belonged to my maid Lucy, and in her hasty departure from town she placed it for security where my husband found it. I recollect now something about a parcel which she said her brother George had given her to take charge of. She appeared to be most anxious about its safety when we started for London. Yet it is inexplicable how her brother should become possessed of any thing belonging to Sir Reginald!"

"There is a mystery in it, no doubt," rejoined her mother—"a perplexing mystery, but time and patience will solve it. As for the letter to Sir Reginald,

that was imprudent of you, darling. You must have used expressions of a friendly character, which a husband in a state of insane jealousy fancied were passionately tender! Was it not so, darling?" asked Lady Maud, endeavouring to catch her daughter's eye. "Speak without reserve, darling."

"Mother, I have said I was innocent of the crime imputed to me—innocent, as I honestly believe, of any approach to it! Let that suffice. As for the letter to Sir Reginald, I had no business to write it. But I meant no harm. I told him Agatha's affections were engaged elsewhere, and begged he would not pay her attention. I was afraid he might possibly supplant poor Lovell. I alluded also to another matter; something in which Sir Reginald was deeply interested, something that had nothing to do with myself. Oliver, excited with grief and anger, as well he might be, mistook the whole purport of the letter!"

"You had better have left Agatha to me," replied her mother, with a slight touch of severity in her manner. "But as for Nugent," added Lady Maud, whilst her handsome face was for one moment disfigured by an expression of bitter contempt, "I have no patience with him! Excited he might be, but that is no reason he should make the matter a public scandal. After all, he never treated either you or myself with proper deference. Talk of worshipping him with your whole heart, indeed! Worship-in these cases must be reciprocal——"

“Mother!” interrupted Gertrude with passionate energy,—“I will not have a word said against him! Not a word! He was a loving, noble-hearted husband, and I was not worthy of him. You shall not find fault with him in my presence!”

Lady Maud’s countenance showed unfeigned astonishment. Her daughter positively ignored her authority! Positively assumed a tone of command towards her!

It was so. Nor was it unnatural. Gertrude had begun to experience the real trials of life. She had fought with affliction. She had struggled with temptation, and resisted the instigations of despair. She had gained an insight into her own and others’ hearts. She was no longer a ductile girl. She was a self-reliant woman.

Gertrude proceeded—

“If I had given myself wholly to him; made it my chief study to please him; put him first in my thoughts, instead of sacrificing him to my selfish, frivolous pleasures—he would have been wholly mine; my wishes would have been his wishes, my hopes would have been his hopes. Calumny would not have in the faintest degree dimmed my image in his heart—he would have believed me innocent, almost against the evidence of his senses!”

Lady Maud felt it was useless to oppose the vehemence of her daughter’s thoughts. She tranquilly waited till that burst of passion had exhausted itself,

then, drawing her chair closer to the table, said, in a tone of quiet decision—

“And now let us consult what is the best course to take.”

Gertrude, still standing motionless by her mother's side, instantly replied in a firm clear voice—

“It is unnecessary to consult. I have already thought it over. Inquiries must be made, and letters written without delay. Mother, will you write for me?”

“Darling, as many letters as you like.”

“Please, then, to write to Oliver's solicitor in the city. Here is his name and address. Ask him if possible to call here before post-time. He will doubtless give us information as to Oliver's movements, and where he can be found. Write to Sir Reginald Clinton, and ask him to meet you at his own house or elsewhere as soon as possible. Write to Mrs. Grierson. Ask her to see Lucy instantly, and question her concerning the contents of the parcel. Ask her to come up to town the moment she has done so. If the matter of the parcel can be cleared up, the rest will be comparatively easy.”

Lady Maud rose, embraced her daughter, and assured her she would lose not a moment in carrying out her instructions. Gertrude tried to thank her, but an hysterical choking in the throat prevented her. She pressed her mother's hand, and once more sought the quiet and seclusion of her own room.

CHAPTER XI.

SUSPENSE.

WE must now carry the reader back to Rentworth, from whence Mr. Spottle and his *protégé*, Daniel Grub, set forth early in the morning on their expedition to Clawthorp Asylum.

It was on the day preceding that on which Nugent called at Sir Reginald's house in Kensington, and found he had started for the country without leaving word whither he was bound.

Spottle being a privileged person, both he and his companion were shown immediately on their arrival into Dr. Crayfoot's sanctum, the little surgery with glass doors. The doctor, who was consoling himself with a pipe of bird's-eye tobacco, no sooner detected a letter in Spottle's hand—the letter which had experienced so many vicissitudes—than to Mr. Grub's immense satisfaction he clutched it greedily, and was about to open it when his eye glanced suspiciously at Mr. Grub, and with habitual wariness he desired him to wait outside the door till he was sent for. Mr. Grub retreated, but dexterously contrived, as he did so, to hitch up a corner

of the red curtain in front of the sash. This enabled him to see the doctor impatiently tear open the letter, extract a bank-note from it, and examine it carefully. Then, with a look of modified gratification, Dr. Crayfoot was seen to slip the bank-note into his purse, and place the letter in his desk for further perusal. After which he turned abruptly to Spottle, and asked who "the deuce" was that ill-looking chap he had brought with him? Spottle began to explain, but at that instant Mr. Daniel Grub, to his unfeigned astonishment, marched into the room and authoritatively exclaimed—

"That'll do, Spottle! You needn't carry on this here game any further. I and the doctor must have a few words together, private-like. You may go, Spottle!"

That gentleman stood staring at Grub, half in anger, half in perplexity.

"Pray, fellow," now roared out Dr. Crayfoot, "who are you? You seem to have a free and easy tongue of your own! Who and what d'ye call yourself? Eh, fellow? Eh?"

"My name," replied Mr. Grub, calmly seating himself in a chair opposite the doctor, and wiping his head mechanically with his handkerchief, "My name is Nutt—Samuel Nutt, sergeant of the Z division of metropolitan police, detective officer employed on special duty. Spottle, you may go!"

Spottle was half-way down the passage leading from the surgery before the words were well out of Mr

Nutt's mouth. As for Dr. Crayfoot, he leant back in his favourite dentist's chair with an expression of countenance such as the extraction of a double back-tooth might very well have evoked.

Mr. Nutt looked at him attentively, then rose and shut the glass door which Spottle had left ajar. Then, taking in at a glance all the principal features of the surgery, he again fixed his eyes on Dr. Crayfoot. The latter, who had by this time somewhat recovered himself, now exclaimed in a raised voice—

“And, pray, what's your business with me, sir?”

“Oh, I knows all about it, doctor! It's no use trying on any game of that sort. You ever see this here letter before, doctor?” So saying, he handed the doctor a copy of the letter sent to Clinton. “A. B. X. Eh, doctor, is that it?”

The doctor started, stared wildly, and clapped his hand instinctively to the pocket in which he had placed the bank-note.

“All right, doctor! Ten pun' note, ain't it? All right, I hope! Come, now,” added Mr. Nutt, drawing his chair a little closer to Dr. Crayfoot, and dropping his voice—“come, now, let's understand each other. We're men of the world. We understand business—we do! Let's come to the point. You've got something—never mind what—information or what not, never mind—you've got something you want to sell. Well, now, you thought to fix a good high price on it. Make Sir

Reg'nald come down handsome afore he knew what you'd got to sell him! That won't do, now. That cock won't fight! You must just tell us all you know, and trust to our liberality for a recompense. D'ye see, doctor?—d'ye take?"

Meantime Dr. Crayfoot, whilst attempting to resume his usual demeanour of cool indifference, was hard at work reflecting what was the best course to take. Should he boldly set the officer at defiance? But he was in the dark how far his information extended. He might be in possession of facts which would expose him to a criminal indictment. Again, money was an object to him. His days as proprietor of Clawthorp asylum were numbered. The quarter-sessions had refused to renew his licence. He would soon be turned adrift with but scanty resources. His case was pretty well desperate, if, by dint of the clue now gained, Sir Reginald succeeded in obtaining the information he sought in some other quarter, and throwing him entirely overboard. He resolved to turn the present moment to account.

Folding his arms, and wrinkling his bloated face into an expression of mingled cunning and impudence, he said, sitting up in his dentist's chair—

"What offer do you make?"

Mr. Nutt glanced his eyes to and fro in a most remarkable manner. Then, fastening them upon the doctor, he said encouragingly—as if he was speaking

to a young gentleman who had been refractory over a dose of physic but was now beginning to gulp it down—

“Come, come! That’s like a man of sense. Come, come!”

“What’s your offer?” repeated Crayfoot firmly.

Mr. Nutt replied by another question—

“Can you produce the lad?”

“That’s neither here nor there,” rejoined the other.

“There must be a sum paid down in cash, and written indemnity for the past.”

“Indeed?” thought Mr. Nutt. “Then there’s something behind, the doctor is afraid should come out. That’s a handle!” Then answered aloud—“Come, doctor, we’re wasting time. My employer’s a kindly-disposed gentleman as ever was. He’ll not be hard on you if you make a clean breast of it, though you know you *was* a bad ’un, doctor!” said Nutt, shaking his head as if he had at command a frightful catalogue of the doctor’s offences, “You *was* a bad ’un! But, if you speak out like a man, you’ll have nought to fear, take my word for it.”

“I must have a sum down!” doggedly repeated the doctor.

“You didn’t ought to expect more than a free pardon. But come, I’ll go so far as fifty pounds just to make things pleasant.”

“Five hundred pounds—not a penny less!”

“Very well! Then I know what course I must take,

Doctor Crayfoot!" And Mr. Nutt rose and made a feint of approaching the doctor with a look of professional sternness.

"Sit down, Mr. Nutt—sit down! Promise me fifty pounds down, and five hundred if the boy be found!"

Mr. Nutt reflected for a while, and then, holding out his hand, said—"Give us your hand, doctor. It's a bargain."

"Half the hundred down 'on the nail' before you leave!" persisted Dr. Crayfoot.

Mr. Nutt, after some more parley, produced from the lining of his waistcoat a roll of notes. "Give me a receipt, doctor, and look sharp."

The doctor's eyes glistened. He wrote a few words of acknowledgment, and clutched the money with infinite satisfaction.

"And now, then, I'll show you the man as knows all about it!"

So saying, the doctor led Mr. Nutt along the passage to a distant part of the establishment, where the disturbances caused by male or female patients could not readily be heard. Here he stopped at a door and tapped gently.

"Miss Winthrop!"

Mr. Nutt gave an involuntary start, and wiped his forehead with energy.

"Yes, sir. You can come in," answered Lucy, open-

ing the door, but shrinking back at the sight of a stranger.

"Don't be frightened, miss," remarked Nutt with a wink, "All friends here!"

"How is your brother?" inquired the doctor.

"Just the same," answered Lucy despondingly. "Sometimes he knows me—sometimes he does not."

"Eh?" interrupted Mr. Nutt, peeping into the room, "This is a queer look-out!"

"Poor fellow—poor fellow!" rejoined Crayfoot. "And, how are you, miss?—how are you? Hope you keep up your spirits. Sharker tells me you don't eat half enough. Now, do try, Miss Winthrop—do try!"

The doctor all this time had been holding Lucy's hand in his, with an expression of countenance which was meant to be paternal, but partook rather of the character of maudlin. Lucy at length withdrew her hand with a jerk and retired to her brother's bedside, whither she was followed by the doctor and Nutt.

"Queer look-out this!" repeated Mr. Nutt in an aside to the doctor, as he gazed upon George Winthrop's blank, expressionless face—"Queer look-out!"

The prospect was certainly not encouraging. The patient lay stretched on his back, with his arms extended and eyes fixed and dilated. On watching him narrowly, you perceived a slight involuntary twitching of the fingers keeping time with the beating of his heart, so

that by this motion of his fingers you could accurately count his pulse.

Occasionally, when Winthrop wanted his sister to sit by him, he would make some inarticulate sounds, for he was conscious in some degree of her presence. Again, when suffering from thirst, or in want of food, he would make similar noises, or move his lips and tongue. Otherwise he was to all intents and purposes a mere heap of breathing flesh, useless, helpless, and motionless. His head had been shaved, and there were marks of leeches and blisters, but no perceptible wound, or bruise.

“What’s the good of this fellow to me, doctor?” inquired Nutt in a rather surly tone of voice, for he did not feel sure that he was not “done” after all.

“A very interesting case is this,” commented the doctor, looking at the patient from a purely scientific point of view—“I have written a short paper, giving a very particular account of it, to the ‘Swampshire Medical Refresher.’ Comes out once a fortnight, you know, Mr. Nutt,” he added, with something like a grin of enjoyment at his companion’s temporary discomfiture—“and is a valuable periodical—very! Sharker!” he exclaimed to that ogress-like individual as she joined the party at the bed-side; “you’re going on much the same here, I see.”

Mrs. Sharker dropped a curtsy, and observed in a

voice of soothing commiseration—"The poor dear is as bad as bad can be!"

Lucy sat down in a corner, and took up a book to hide her tears.

Mr. Nutt took Dr. Crayfoot rather uncereemoniously by the arm, and led him out of the room.

"I say, doctor, this don't suit me at all, I can tell you! Sam Nutt is not going to be made a fool of! Have you got any thing more to tell me? or d'ye think I'm going to rest satisfied just with having a stare at that 'ere breathing carcass? Eh, doctor?"

And Mr. Nutt was guilty of the impropriety of shaking his companion's shoulder with some impatience.

Dr. Crayfoot answered petulantly—

"Why! man, how can I help it? Don't I want the fellow cured quite as much as you do? Wouldn't it be a good round sum of money in my pocket? What can I do?"

"Get other advice, to be sure," answered Nutt with a promptitude any thing but complimentary to the doctor's professional skill.

"Well, I'm agreeable, if you insist upon it. But the fact is, there's been such a cursed deal of unpleasantness in the house owing to the visitors running rusty, that I've rather wished to keep matters quiet, you see. But Parkes has seen the man more than once, and we've consulted about it, and think he should be moved to the county hospital. But then—there—I

thought he might come round without all that bother and publicity!"

Nutt thought a minute, and said—

"Tell thee what, doctor; I've three parts of a mind to telegraph for Brodie!"

The doctor whistled.

"I have, doctor! But maybe I had better see Sir Reg'nald first. Who's that young woman along with the fellow?"

"Lucy Winthrop, his sister. She's a lady's-maid to Mrs. Nugent of Okenham, near this. And a nice-looking, blue-eyed thing, too!"

"Oh, well! I shall want to have some words with her before very long. But now, doctor, give us some breakfast, for I'm main peckish; and we'll have some more talk together about this business."

In about an hour, Mr. Nutt was off again on a rough half-broken colt belonging to the doctor, which he had taken the liberty to borrow. He rode to the railway station at Rentworth, and booked a small parcel, marked "immediate," for London. It contained a few hasty lines from Mr. Nutt, intimating that he was down at the Swampshire Arms, Rentworth; and, if convenient, he thought that Sir Reginald's presence there might now be useful. The scent was not quite so cold as it had been, and it would be as well to follow it up close.

Clinton, instantly pulling out his watch, found he was in time to catch the mail train, and gave orders to

the servants to make immediate preparations for his departure.

In the course of a few hours he was in close conference with Mr. Nutt in a private room at the Swampshire Arms, Rentworth. Mr. Nutt was rather less nonchalant than usual, and the blue check handkerchief was frequently in request, whilst he narrated to Clinton the history of his proceedings during the last few days.

The first step Sir Reginald took after hearing all that Nutt had to say, was to start for Clawthorp, and, with that officer's valuable assistance, institute a strict inquiry into the nature of the understanding subsisting between Dr. Crayfoot and George Winthrop. By a happy union of bribery and intimidation, something was discovered, but not much; enough to throw light upon the past, but not enough for their future guidance. The fate of one of those of whom Clinton was in search, was definitively ascertained. But the secret of the other's whereabouts was lodged in the sick man's breast. Lucy was questioned. But, as she had been scrupulously left in the dark by her brother, could give no information bearing upon the point.

After a day spent at the asylum, an hour or so of which Clinton passed locked up alone, in the room formerly occupied by the so-called Signora Bianchi, the two returned to Rentworth.

Here, however, Mr. Nutt was not allowed to repose, but was despatched on a fresh mission. He was to find

out Mr. Grierson the surgeon, take him straightway to Clawthorp, and ask his opinion as to the best mode of treating Winthrop. Clinton, who still shrunk from unnecessary publicity, only revealed to the surgeon that the patient was in possession of important information, and that it was a matter of the deepest moment that he should be cured, or at least restored to his senses.

Whilst Nutt was absent on this mission, Clinton paced up and down the sitting-room at the hotel, labouring under painful excitement.

It was late that night before Nutt reappeared. Clinton hastily advanced towards him—

“Well, Mr. Nutt, is your news good or bad? What does Grierson say of the man’s state?”

Mr. Nutt stepped to the door, and told the waiter to ask Mr. Grierson to come up.

“You see, Sir Reg’nald, I like every man to stick to his own line. This here Grierson’s a better hand at surgery than I am. Let him talk to you himself.”

The surgeon’s smile, though not we are bound to say invariably warranted by the result of the cases under his care, was always cheering, especially to strangers.

Clinton felt confident of good news the moment he saw his face. He shook him by the hand, with almost a feeling of gratitude, and exclaimed—

“Mr. Grierson, I am rejoiced to see you! Pray, take a chair. Now, have the goodness to give me your can-

did opinion as to this George Winthrop. Can he be cured? Is he likely to regain consciousness?"

Grierson smiled in a way which warmed Clinton's heart. Then remarked in a pleasant voice—

"Why, to speak frankly, Sir Reginald, that is a matter of the purest conjecture!"

Clinton leant back in his chair with an air of disgust.

"I should perhaps be only encouraging false hopes, a thing I am always anxious to avoid," continued Grierson, still cheerfully smiling, "if I spoke with any confidence of doing the man good. He ought to have been long ago removed to the hospital. That is the proper place for him."

"Then you decline to undertake the case?" replied Clinton, with some impatience.

"My own persuasion is," answered Grierson, "that the man is labouring under compression of the brain arising from injuries caused by his fall out of window. If I were called upon to undertake the case, which I repeat is a case for the county hospital, I should certainly trephine the patient."

"Very good!" rejoined Clinton; "very good! Let him be trephined."

"That's my opinion, too," put in Mr. Nutt, with an approving nod.

"On the other hand," continued Grierson, "some are opposed to trephining. Sir George Ballingall gives sixteen cases of wounds of shell which recovered, quite

unexpectedly after the battle of Talavera, by what he calls 'cold applications;' but Stromeier maintains, that they recovered because Sir George was flying before the enemy, and had not time to use his trephine!"

And Mr. Grierson gave a laugh, the merriment of which at any other time would have been infectious.

"Still, I lean to the opinion that this is a case for the trephine. The man must die if he continues much longer in this state."

"Then will you undertake it or not, Mr. Grierson?" asked Clinton.

"Ay, Mr. Grierson—that's the point!" added Nutt.

Mr. Grierson smiled and pondered. It was a case for the county hospital. Certainly it was. Nevertheless, with the advice and co-operation of a surgical friend at Rentworth, he shouldn't mind taking it in hand.

So Mr. Grierson departed to make the requisite arrangements.

Next day Clinton is seated at the window of his apartment at the "Swampshire Arms," gazing down the High-street, and listening to the sound of every horse or carriage that comes that way. He has been posted there for some hours, and looks worn and anxious. But suddenly a man, on a shaggy-looking active pony, turns the further corner of the street, comes up to the door of the hotel at a gallop, shouts for the hostler,

dismounts, and hurries into the house before the latter has caught hold of the reins.

The door of Clinton's sitting-room is flung open, and in walks Mr. Nutt, in a state of unusual flurry, with a note in his outstretched hand.

"All right, Sir Reg'nald—all right!"

Clinton seizes it, and tears it open.

"CLAWTHORP ASYLUM,

Friday, 2½ P.M.

"DEAR SIR,—I am happy to say the operation has been thus far successful. The patient's fingers have ceased to twitch. He has lifted his hand to his head, and tried to raise himself on his pillow. Also, has spoken a few words relating to his accident which he supposes has just happened. These are symptoms of returning volition and sensation. I trephined over the site of the middle meningeal artery on the left side, and, to my great pleasure, found a large clot of blood between the bone and the dura mater, which I removed. I will only add that the most perfect quiet is essential to the successful progress of the case.—Your obedient faithful servant,

"T. GRIERSON."

"Order a carriage and horses for Clawthorp, to be ready in ten minutes!" exclaimed Clinton, springing up from his seat. "I cannot myself enter that hateful place again, but you must, Mr. Nutt. You must be on

the spot. You must be ready to see Winthrop the instant Grierson permits."

Despite Sir Reginald's anxiety to obtain immediate information from Winthrop concerning Edward, Mr. Grierson positively forbade any one to enter the sick man's room except his sister. Excitement would undo the good that had been done, and endanger the man's life. For a week or so the most absolute quiet was essential.

Nevertheless, the functions of the brain being healthily at work and the system relieved, in two or three days Winthrop evinced a great desire to converse. First his thoughts ran entirely upon events immediately preceding his accident. He puzzled Lucy by more than once inquiring if she knew whether the advertisement Dr. Crayfoot and himself sent to the *Times* had elicited any reply? Lucy's chief care was to keep him quiet, but, as his mind became clearer and more collected, she found this a difficult task.

It seemed as though the consciousness of lying helpless on a sick-bed, unable to exert himself, and with no one at hand competent to advise him, preyed upon his mind, and produced the very restlessness the medical men wished to prevent. Winthrop was now well aware that he had met with a serious accident, and that, though his present condition promised well, there was no certainty of his recovery—there was still a possibility of untoward symptoms reappearing.

Therefore, when Mr. Grierson called one morning, and

had seen the patient, and conferred with Lucy, he came to the conclusion that the quiet system was in this case a decidedly exciting one. So, sitting down by Winthrop's bedside, he asked him, in a friendly cheerful tone of voice, whether there was any one he would like to see—any of his friends he would like to have a talk with?

Winthrop's eye immediately lighted up. He replied that there was some one he would give any thing to see.

"Ay, ay! And who is that, Winthrop? Who is that?"

"Sir Reginald Clinton," was the reply. Mr. Grierson shook his head.

"Not yet, Winthrop! Not yet! Too exciting—too exciting!"

"Well, then," rejoined the patient, "let me see Mr. Lovell, the rector of Okenham. I'm sure it will do me good. I've something on my mind, doctor, and I shall not be easy till I have said what I want to say."

Mr. Grierson reflected a moment. Then, rising from his chair, said cheerily—

"I believe you are about right, Winthrop. But mind, if I drive Mr. Lovell over here this afternoon, and we find you all in a flurry of excitement, I shall just drive him home again without his seeing you. Do you understand, Winthrop?"

"Doctor, I don't think I shall be excited. It will do me good—it will, indeed! I have been longing for it this

many a day, only I was a coward and dared not speak. Now, lying here and not knowing what will become of me, I feel I *must* make a clean breast of it—I *must* make amends, so far as I can, whilst I have life and reason left to me.”

So Grierson nodded his head in an encouraging sort of way, and then very deliberately walked to the door which he opened and shut with equal deliberation. But, the moment he was in the passage, he started off in search of Dr. Crayfoot at a pace which almost became a good swinging trot.

The proprietor of Clawthorp Retreat was not particularly gracious in the reception of Grierson's intelligence. He *pooh-poohed* the notion of a clergyman, signifying that he, Dr. Crayfoot, was “as good as a parson any day of the week,” and would be proud to hear all that Winthrop had to say, and give him sound practical advice into the bargain. This liberal offer did not seem precisely to satisfy Grierson, since he not only declined it, but commissioned Mr. Nutt to keep guard over Winthrop's door, and suffer no one except Lucy to enter the room.

In the afternoon, according to his promise, Mr. Grierson reappeared with Lovell. The latter, after Grierson had gone up-stairs and seen the state of his patient, was shown into Winthrop's room.

At first the sick man was agitated, but a few words of friendly encouragement restored him to composure. Then, as soon as every one but Lovell and himself

had left the room, Winthrop began to converse on the subject which at present occupied his thoughts. He had, he said, so often gone over in his own mind the chief passages of the tale he had to unfold, that he thought, with occasional pauses, he could tell the whole to Lovell from the beginning. Lovell could make what notes he pleased. All that he stipulated for was that his sister Lucy should be cared for, and that no one should suffer from any revelations he might make.

Lovell, who had full authority deputed to him, having immediately promised that these conditions should be complied with, Winthrop commenced his statement, pausing from time to time to take rest, or to enable Lovell to make a note of any circumstance of importance, or to ask for further information.

CHAPTER XII.

WINTHROP'S CONFESSION.

“WHEN I joined Mr. Clinton’s service—for Sir Reginald was only Mr. Clinton then—he was young and wild, and on bad terms with his father, Sir Lawrence. You see he used to run up a lot of bills, and when Sir Lawrence gave him the money to pay them, ten to one but he would be off to the gambling-table, and lose every farthing of it. So ’twas never ending, still beginning. Now, Mr. Lovell, I dare say you have noticed that servants are very apt to walk in their masters’ footsteps; partly because they think it fine; partly because they think their master can’t be very sharp on them for following so good an example. So I took to betting in a small way myself, and went to the bad almost as fast as my young master. Now you must know, Mr. Lovell, I had no father nor mother living; only one sister, that’s to say, Lucy, and I had put her to school quite decent, and paid every thing for her regularly, when luck began to go against me. Of course the worse luck I had, the more I struggled to recover my losses, and the faster I went down-hill. Then I mortgaged a little

property I had in D——shire, where I first came from ; but the mortgagees threatened to foreclose, and I was in danger of losing it all, and, what's more, I overdrew my wages under one plea or another, till at last I got almost desperate. For you see there was my poor dear Lucy dependent on me for food, clothes, schooling, and every thing, and I felt I had acted like a selfish beast towards her.

“Well, this was about two years after Mr. Clinton's marriage. Most people don't think he was ever married ; but I know better, and I will tell you how it happened. We were in Paris when he fell in love with an Italian lady. She was a handsome creature, but terribly passionate and self-willed. I don't believe she was any thing but poor, for she came to Paris to teach singing and music ; but she managed matters very cleverly, and it was not many weeks before they got married by a popish priest, and she prevailed on my master to take her back to Florence, where she might show off a little amongst her old acquaintances. So back to Florence they went, and lived for a while pretty comfortably till money began to grow short. Then they took to quarrelling and falling out, for Mr. Clinton, he was hot-tempered as well as my lady, and spoke sharp enough sometimes ; and then off she would go to her relations, and not come back until he asked her. Now, nothing hurt Mr. Clinton more than stooping to do this. I don't think he ever forgave her for it ; and at length he warned her he

would let her stay away altogether some day if she did not take care.

“At last Mr. Clinton got some money from an aunt who died in England, but even this did not make all straight. The wound would not heal, as it were.

“Then Mrs. Clinton was confined and had a fine boy enough, and I did think they were really friends again. But no. Soon every thing was as bad ever. Mrs. Clinton took to being jealous, for you see my master went into a great deal of English society at Florence; and when she took to being jealous there was an end of all peace. I don't think she was altogether right in her head even then. But you see Mr. Clinton did not humour her enough, and no great wonder either, for she was aggravating, and he a mere lad: he was not twenty-one when he married her. Well, the worst of it was, that this child, which might have been a comfort to them, was no better than a curse. Mrs. Clinton was always for making the lad love her the best of the two, and, to make sure of it, taught him to be afraid of his father, and to scream out when he went to take him in his arms. This made master furious enough at first, but after a time he got used to it, and took very little notice of the lad.

“Well, as I was saying, I was in great straits for money, and I was always thinking and thinking of some plan to better myself. For the people who had charge of Lucy began to grow impatient, and once threw out a threat,

that if I did not pay their bills more regular they would take and throw her on the parish. This half drove me mad. It was just then that a fresh trouble arose betwixt my master and Mrs. Clinton. There came to Florence an English lady, separated from her husband on account of his ill-using her. She was not very young, but she was what you call a very pretty fascinating creature, and gentle and soft in her manners. So Mr. Clinton used to be with her a good deal, because, as he took care to tell my lady when she was hot and angry, the Englishwoman's voice soothed him and gave him a little taste of quietness. Sometimes again he would make it up with my lady, and be friends for a while; but on the first provocation off he would go to the Via della Strada, where this English lady lived, and stay there till nightfall. His excuse was that he only did this when his wife's temper drove him wild, and when she set his own child to make faces at him.

“I am now coming to the last great quarrel. Some French friends of Mrs. Clinton were staying at Florence, and she made a party to go with them to see the ‘Pitti Palace.’ Mr. Clinton, he knew nothing of this appointment, because he had been absent at Rome to see the holy-week celebrations, and only returned that very morning. So, when he found his wife out with a party of friends, he thinks he would take the opportunity of paying a visit to some of his own friends, and forthwith sets off for the Via della Strada. Well, whom

should he meet at the top of the street but the lady he was in quest of, with her maid walking as usual behind her! So he comes up to her, and addresses her, and when he looks in her face he finds she is as pale as death, and all of a tremble. He gives her his arm, and helps her home, for all she begged him to leave her—she being nevertheless ready to drop from exhaustion. So as soon as she is at home, and has had some *sal volatile*, she tells him how she had been at the Pitti Palace that morning and had met the Signora, that is to say, Mrs. Clinton, who had burst out upon her with a volley of abuse in French, English, and Italian, calling her every bad name under the sun, accusing her of seducing my master, and I don't know what besides; and all this in public, amidst a mob of fashionables, and artists, and all sorts, clustering round, staring and grinning.

“Mr. Clinton when he heard this, was pretty nigh beside himself. He hurried home to speak his mind plainly to his wife. Well, as soon as he was up-stairs in the salon, he bitterly upbraided her for exposing herself and him, and insulting an honourable lady for whom he had a sincere regard. Now, I don't know exactly all that happened; but from what I could gather Mrs. Clinton flung a knife, or scissors, or something of the sort, right at his head. Indeed, some said that she stabbed him with a stiletto, but that I am not sure of. 'Tis certain the arm of master's coat had a small hole through it, and there was a good deal of blood on his

shirt sleeve, but it is no great matter now. All I know is, there was a scuffle of some sort, and the poor child came in for some of the mischief. For the nurse heard him scream, and, running in, found him lying on Mrs. Clinton's lap with a bleeding forehead. He had been frightened at the noise, and, running towards the door, fell over a stool and hit his head against the corner of the stove. It was only a slight cut, and not of much consequence. But I name it now, because, small as it was, it left a little triangular scar on the boy's temple, which he has to this day. Any body could swear to it.

“ Well, there was a lull for a minute. Then the voices again grew loud, and we heard master tell Mrs. Clinton quite plain, that she was only his wife by sufferance; that their marriage was not legal; that he might cast her off to-morrow; for he was under age when he married her, and minors might do just what they liked, and not be held accountable at civil law. Then he ran down-stairs and left the house, going I believe to a surgeon's to have his arm dressed, for it is certain it was hurt. Now, as soon as he was gone, the Signora packed up a lot of her things and all her jewels, and started for Leghorn, taking Edward along with her, and leaving a few lines on Mr. Clinton's dressing-table. As soon as master returned, which was not till late that night, he ordered a light carriage and started for Leghorn in pursuit; but he came back next day the same as he went, for Mrs. Clinton, I afterwards learnt, had got

on board a Mediterranean steamer bound for Marseilles, and sailed before her husband arrived, child and all.

“First my master took on rather, and talked of travelling overland in pursuit; but my opinion was, and is, that at the time he was main glad to be rid of her. Not but what he wished to act handsome, for he wrote a letter to Marseilles, advising his bankers to advance her fifty pounds on demand. For you must know, Mr. Lovell, that I had now got into a habit of reading most of the letters master wrote as well as those he received, being at my wit's end, and thinking something might turn up to my advantage.

“Very soon he got a letter from her, stating she was on her road to England, to Sir Lawrence Clinton, and meant to lay the whole case from first to last before him, and appeal to his sense of honour to make his son do what was right by her, and not cast her off as a worthless creature. This took Mr. Clinton rather aback, and he worried himself about it the best part of two days. For Sir Lawrence had heard nothing about his marriage, and my master feared there would be a terrible to-do when he knew of it, even if it proved not to be legal. Yet for all that, he never wished to see the Signora again, and at that time did not much care for the boy either. So at length he decided to send me off in pursuit, and instructed me to take charge of her, and rather than let her go to Sir Lawrence, I was to bring her back to Florence. Same time he wrote a letter

explaining matters, and promising, if she would live quietly in Paris or elsewhere, and not divulge any thing to Sir Lawrence, he would make the marriage legal. Furthermore, he told her he had authorized the Southampton bankers, for to Southampton she was bound, to honour her drafts to the extent of five hundred pounds. For, you see, he was in a great strait, and hoped to calm her down.

“Well, when I found out about this five hundred pounds, and knew she had got money with her, and a parcel of fine clothes and jewellery, there seemed an evil spirit for ever whispering in my ear that I ought to make a very good thing out of this. Mr. Clinton certainly had been an indulgent master enough; but I had no great love to his lady, and was in a sad fix about my own debts and what not. Still, I don’t think I meant any thing very bad when I first started from Florence in pursuit of Mrs. Clinton, only I thought I might safely pick up a few crumbs of this money which seemed flying about, and perhaps repay it by and bye if times grew better.

“I followed close on Mrs. Clinton’s track till she reached Havre, and there I thought I would not show myself, for I wanted her to get all right to Southampton, where her money was waiting for her. I went in the same steamer with her from Havre, but kept out of sight till I saw her and the child safely landed on the Southampton pier, and heard where they were going.

She went to the first hotel the fly-driver recommended, and after an hour or two, I came upon her all of a hurry as it were, and said I was sent to take care of her, and gave her Mr. Clinton's letter. Well, she was made as savage as ever by that letter, because Clinton never once begged her to come back to him. She was for starting for London to see Sir Lawrence that very night. Now, this did not suit my purpose at all, and I was beating my brains to find some way to keep her where she was, when, by good-luck as I then thought, I fell in with a gentleman's servant, who told me Sir Lawrence was not in England, but had started for Pau with his eldest son, Philip, who was out of health. When Mrs. Clinton heard this, she was mainly put out, and at first would not believe it; but I got an old number of the "Morning Post," which had Sir Lawrence's departure down in black and white, and this seemed to stagger her. For all that, she seemed bent on getting hold of Sir Lawrence, and at last made up her mind to draw her five hundred pounds out of the Southampton bank, and then start right away for Pau. Now this was just what I wanted her to do. Only she was so excited about it, and gave herself such airs at the hotel, that I began to fear the matter would become the talk of the town, and that some one or other would interfere and baulk me of my booty. So I talked to her very seriously and kindly, and told her to go to work without so much fuss and disturbance. Then I

got her to draw a small sum on the Southampton bank, just by way of introduction, as it were. There was a little delay at first, but after showing letters and passports the bank cashed the cheque, and from thenceforth it was pretty plain sailing. In a few days she drew all her money in bank of England notes and gold, acting under my advice, because I showed her in a friendly way that she might make a good profit by changing her money the other side of the water.

“Well, now, my plans seemed to be working well, and I had fully made up my mind to help myself by hook or by crook to a good share of her cash, when a circumstance occurred which gave me quite a new idea. First of all I must tell you that the people of the hotel we were staying at, had for some days complained of hearing strange noises during the night, as if some one were making speeches or singing songs outside their windows. Well, one night I was going up to bed from the smoking-room—where I had been having a quiet rubber of whist with some gentlemen who were servants of parties staying in the town—when it struck me, as I passed the window on the landing, that I heard strange sounds somewhere outside the house. So I opened the window and looked out. Sure enough there was a female standing at an open bedroom window that looked into the back yard, and it was she who was making the noise—sometimes singing, and sometimes talking. First I could not think who it was; but when I heard it was

Italian she was speaking, then I knew all about it in the twinkling of an eye, and coupling it with her excited flurried manner ever since our arrival in England, I suspected she was either downright crazy, or well on the road to it. She was artful enough, too. For next day what should she do but complain to the landlady of the hotel of some one having disturbed her by singing and talking great part of the night! But I was now pretty sure she was wrong in her head, and I took measures accordingly.

“You see, being a foreigner, she knew nothing about this country. So I proposed that we should not go to Pau at all, as Sir Lawrence would soon be home again, and we might miss him on the road; but that we should start straight for Sir Lawrence’s country seat in Wales, and, taking lodgings in the neighbourhood, quietly await his return. She took kindly to this plan, and the same day we all started for London, because I wanted to keep the Southampton people in the dark as to where we were bound.

We stayed a few nights in an out-of-the-way place in the City, and an anxious time I had of it. But I had been always a dabbler in drugs, and by the help of sedatives, and one thing and the other, I managed to keep Mrs. Clinton tolerably quiet. Indeed, sometimes she was as rational as you or me, only a little flighty and forgetful. Still I dared not leave her alone, and felt much put to it how to carry out my plans. You see,

if it had not been for Lucy, I might have got the money and cut clean away. But then, sooner or later, it would have been found out, and my character blasted, and Lucy pointed at as the sister of a scoundrel. This I could not abide the thought of. So what I aimed at was to get the lady stowed away somewhere safe, where she wouldn't be heard of again. I wasn't many hours in London, before I bethought me of a fellow I had known in D——shire, a rough sort of brute who didn't know what fear or shame meant. This man I knew had got a place as keeper at a private asylum or mad-house, and it always had struck me that the proprietor must be a queer fish to have such a man as Jack Worrill, or Harrill as he since called himself, on his premises at all. I wrote off to this man, enclosing a £5 note, for I had plenty of money left from what Mr. Clinton had allowed me on starting for England. And I told Harrill, in a dark sort of way, that there was a lady under my charge whom a nobleman of fortune wished to get into an asylum without any fuss or publicity. I didn't of course mention names, and told Harrill there was plenty of cash ready if the thing could be well managed.

“I never knew for certain whether Harrill consulted Dr. Crayfoot—for of course it is this very place I am speaking of—about the best way of doing the job ; but I suppose he did, for Jack Harrill was not much of a scholar, and his only notion of managing matters was

going straightforwards like a bull. However, he came up to town next day, and brought a parcel of blank forms for filling up. He also gave me the address of a low kind of surgeon who would sign for the sake of a double fee any certificate that was put before him. Well, I was too far gone now to stick at trifles. I got one or two necessary forms filled up, and a certificate signed by the surgeon; and, when one surgeon signs a thing of this kind, it is easy to get another to do the same. I worked hard all night, writing letters and drawing up sham documents of different kinds to give the whole thing a colour. It was the old story, Mr. Lovell. Once set the stone rolling down hill, and it is not an easy matter to stop it. I never dreamed I should stoop to forgery, but so it was. If I ever get my health again, I will try to make amends, but all I can do now is to ask pardon of my Maker, and of those I have wickedly injured.

“We all started from town in a hired chaise and pair. My lady and I rode inside, with Edward on a little seat in front of us. Foreigners aren’t so particular as English ladies about keeping company with those beneath them. Besides, you see I was a kind of confidential servant, a cross betwixt a valet and a secretary. We were inside, and Harrill he sat on the box and drove, because we did not want any of the livery-stable folk to notice my lady. We went twenty or thirty mile, and then took the rail to M——. After which we had

to go by stage-coach, for in those days the line beyond M—— was not completed. We changed our course once or twice, and managed so cleverly that I don't think it would have been easy to track us, if master had set about doing so a few months instead of several years afterwards.

“The following day we put up at a retired roadside inn about forty miles from Clawthorp. It was nine o'clock at night when we arrived, and my lady was excited and wandered a good deal in her talk. So I gave her a stiff dose of infusion of poppies and some laudanum along with it. I gave the poor child a taste of the poppies, too. Yes, you may well shake your head, but I did not mean to hurt him. 'Twas only to keep him quiet. For I must tell you that ever since we left Southampton, Mrs. Clinton had taken quite an antipathy, as is common in such cases, to her own child, and flatly refused to have him with her at night. I was obliged to take charge of the lad myself, and being afraid he might sing out if I left him alone in the dark, I gave him a sup of the poppy mixture. He slept like a lamb, and as for Harrill I plied him with drink till he reeled to bed as I believed pretty nigh dead drunk.

“And now was the time, as I thought, for doing something decisive. The Signora kept her money and valuables in a tin case which she rarely let go out of her sight, and carefully put under her pillow at night.

“Well, at about two o'clock, when all the house was still, and not a sound was heard except Harrill snoring in the next room to mine, I slipped out of bed and went very quietly to Mrs. Clinton's bedroom door. I had taken away the key the night before, but, tired as she was, she made such a fuss about it, that the chambermaid found her another that fitted the lock. So she had locked herself in. It was full ten minutes before I could unlock the door, for the other key was left in, and I had to work very gently to push it out. However, at last I heard it fall on the floor inside, and then I was in the room in a trice. She, poor lady, heard nothing of all this, for she was stupefied with the drugs I had given her, and was sleeping very sweetly. I got the tin box from under her pillow, and found her keys by the side of it. So I carried the box to the window, opened it, and took out all the money except a sovereign or two, and all the jewellery except a few articles of small value. This was to avert suspicion when her things came to be overhauled at the asylum. After that, I replaced the box under her pillow, and put the key and the bank-notes and the jewellery in my pocket. The sovereigns rattled so, that I carried some of them in my hand. As I turned to leave the room, the door which I had left ajar creaked a little, but I thought it was only the wind, and made all haste along the passage back to my room.

“I had just reached the door, when I felt some one

breathing hard, close to my neck. My knees almost gave way under me, and a cold sweat burst out on my forehead. I turned sharp round, and whom should I see in the light of the moon, shining through the passage window, but Jack Harrill! I believe he suspected something the night before, and shammed drunk to put me off my guard. Well, he grinned at me like a very demon, and growled in my ear in a hoarse whisper—

“‘Halves, you rogue, or I’ll peach!’

“And shaking his fist in my face swore with a brutal oath he meant what he said. Well, all taken by surprise as I was, I thought I had no choice but to humour him. After a few words we both went into my room together, and whilst he was striking a light I contrived to hide the bank-notes amongst the child’s bed-clothes, for fear Harrill should find out how much I had got. We then had a long talk. At first I thought his proposals moderate enough, but this bad man was deeper than I gave him credit for. He could not be sure what booty I had. But this he was sure of, that when every thing was settled, he could draw upon me for almost as much as he liked, for I should be pretty well at his mercy. I gave him a few trinkets and a handful of gold, and promised more if all turned out well. He seemed quite content.

“Amongst the jewellery was a popish rosary, which I slipped into Harrill’s hand along with the other things,

to make them seem more bulky. That rosary the fellow kept by him all these years, thinking I suppose it would help to identify the lad in case inquiry should ever be made for him. It was found in his pocket when his body was fished out of the Oke river at the time of the flood. Lucy got possession of it, and put it with some books I gave her to take charge of. The books Mrs. Clinton brought away with her from Florence, and I put them away thinking I might find them useful some day or other. There was also, I should say, a miniature of my master, which I took good care to lay hold of.

“But to return to Jack Harrill. He and I discussed a long time what we should do with the child, and at last it was agreed he should undertake the charge for so much a week, on my paying a pretty good sum down. You see he had kept company in D——shire with a respectable young woman, Margaret Williams by name—you recollect her well, Mr. Lovell—and Harrill thought, as he could now leave the asylum and make up a little purse, he would take and marry her at once, and pass off the boy as a love child, no matter whose. So far, then, we settled the matter satisfactorily enough.

“Next day was a terrible one, and, athirst as I was for money, I don't think I could have gone through with it for thousands, had I known beforehand what was coming, and had it not been for that infamous scoundrel Harrill egging me on.

“Well, sir, perhaps you are right. I have no business to throw the blame on him, for I was bad enough before I had him at my back. But to proceed. First of all, the Signora came down-stairs a deal better in her mind than she had been for days. This I did not like at all. She seemed quite another person, and talked quite rational. She asked a great many questions, and plied me so hard that I hardly knew which way to turn. Was this the road to Llanellesmere (Sir Lawrence’s place)? Would I lend her my guide-book? Had I got a map of England? Who was that ill-looking ruffian who was hanging on to our party (meaning Harrill)? Would it not be best to take lodgings in the nearest post-town, and ascertain from Mr. Clinton, before going to Llanellesmere, whether he was really serious in his statement about the marriage? Whether, in short, he had not been merely frightening her?

“Altogether, I felt quite shaken and uncomfortable. For our plan was to have taken her straight away to Clawthorp, and there have left her. All I could do for the present was to pretend to fall in with her schemes, and try to keep things comfortable till she should have another access of mania. But it was a trying day for me—very trying. My lady took to her boy again quite kindly, would not let him out of her sight, had him on her knee, or strolled with him in the garden or in the fields opposite, all day. I was thoroughly posed. But one comfort was, that she took no heed of her

jewel-box, or noticed that the key was gone. Harrill, who was a thoroughly abandoned villain—well, Mr. Lovell, what you say is near about the truth, we were both of us bad enough—Harrill pressed me to give her some drug which should upset her brain again.

“Now I would not hear of this at first, and I think this was to my credit. But as evening drew on, the old excitement began to come over her again. Her dark eyes became all of a blaze, and her cheeks flushed. She pushed away her child, and I felt she would soon be bad enough without any wicked tampering on my part. In fact, she soon began to talk wild, and told the people of the inn she intended to travel back to Florence that night. Harrill jumped at this, and before I could throw in a word he had got a fly and pair to the door, and had all her things packed up and ready for a start. First of all I resisted, for my resolution was giving way, and I had compassion on the poor lady. Then I found, to my grief and rage, how much I was in this fellow’s power. He threatened me with exposure, knowing I had more at stake than he had, and dared not thwart him if he chose to be firm. He brought a large glass of brandy and water, and made me give it her. I did it much against my will, and called it ‘tisane.’ This was just before starting. It inflamed her brain and made her quite wild, and I doubt if she ever recovered it. There was a great deal of bustle and excitement. It all seems like a dream now; but I know that before long we were

once more under way, pushing forwards to Clawthorp in the stillness of the night, with the moon shining bright over hill and valley. She was what you call 'raving' when we pulled up at the entrance gates of the Clawthorp Asylum. I never hear a shriek now but what I think of that poor lady! But one comfort is from what I have learnt I don't think the Signora was ever in her right senses after she entered these walls.

"It did not need any more lies to make her do what we wished, for we were forced to slip what Dr. Crayfoot calls a 'patent holdfast,' that is to say a jacket with very long sleeves, over her shoulders, and so carried her in-doors. Oh! the noise did not create any surprise in the neighbourhood. People were used to it. The more a person struggles and resists as he crosses the threshold, the madder he seems to be. Then, if he talks quiet and earnest-like to the commissioners and such folk, 'tis easy to say—'Oh! you should have heard him yesterday morning, gentlemen!' Or turn to the journal, and request them to observe that 'Friday week, at half-past ten in the morning, he chased one of the keepers round the room, and tried to bite his nose off.' Well, we knocked up the matron—she with the teeth, Mr. Lovell—Sharker by name, and attendants, and soon had our poor lady inside the asylum safe in bed. The only difficulty was with the child, who screamed, yelled, and kicked—for he had a will of his own—and would not be pacified at his mother's absence. However,

I gave him an opium lozenge or two, and quieted him a bit. Then Harrill, having dismissed the fly, carried the lad in his arms to the cottage where the girl Margaret lived. It was a mile or so away in the hamlet of Clawthorp. I did not set eyes on the lad for ten years, and by that time every one thought it was Harrill's own son."

Winthrop paused for a few minutes to take breath, and drink some cooling mixture. Then, after answering a few questions Lovell put to him, he recommenced—

"After Harrill left, I was closeted with the doctor, overhauling certificates and papers of all sorts. I had rather an anxious morning of it. The greedy fellow tried to screw no end of money out of me, thinking this was a job of some nobleman or man of wealth. I did not get out of his clutches until I had paid down two hundred pounds as a first year's payment for my lady's board and maintenance, or, as we called her then, for Madame Bianchi's. I felt, when I got out of the place, that after all I had not made so great a profit out of this black business as I had calculated upon. But no doubt the doctor ran some risk himself; for the certificates he well knew were irregular, if only on this ground that more than three days had passed since they were signed. But Cray is not over nice on those points, and what is more, visitors and commissioners were more easy-going gents in those days than they are now, though I don't say there's not room for plenty of

improvement—yes, plenty. Well, there then the Signora was safely lodged, and as I said, it is a comfort to think her reason never came back, though she lived on for some years, making Crayfoot look very ugly; since he got no more money from me, and yet was afraid of throwing her on the Union for fear of the guardians inquiring into the whole affair. No doubt, he found out I had palmed off more than one forgery upon him. But he had compromised himself very seriously, and dared not show me up, for he was in the same boat as myself. Still I felt he and Harrill had a hold upon me, and that I was not a free man.

“My first notion was to take Lucy away to America or Australia, and settle down peacefully under a new name. But a serious difficulty presented itself. She was in delicate health, and the doctors said she could not stand travelling. I had done all this wickedness mainly for her sake, and did not fancy parting, but there was no help for it. I was bound to keep out of the way lest Mr. Clinton should get scent of what I had been up to, and make a disagreeable stir about it. I had stopped my lady’s letters to him, all except one, which she wrote one night after her mind was affected. This being a letter with nothing but abuse in it, I thought would be likely to do good, and sent it duly by post. Same time I wrote to him myself, and said my lady was thinking of returning quietly to France. Also I told him a made up story, that I was obliged to

remain in England on business of my own. This I thought would give me time to look about. My first care was to turn the jewels into money, and I knew this must not be done in a hurry, or I should be fleeced by the trade. So I went about the business very bold, making appointments and keeping them punctually, leaving sample articles to be examined and taking receipts for them with an air of being very particular and fussy. My dodge all along was to pretend to be an agent of some person of quality. By dint of perseverance and firmness I got nearly three hundred pounds from the trade, partly in London and partly elsewhere, which was pretty well.

“Meantime, I went down into D——shire to settle my affairs. I sold my little property to the mortgagees, and received a hundred pounds or so after settling all demands. Then I took Lucy away from the people with whom I had left her, giving out I meant to take her to Cheltenham to drink the waters. I went, however, straight away with her to London; for London is the place to plunge into if you wish to baffle pursuit. It is like running water to a pack of hounds, and puts every one at fault. Lucy was but fourteen years old, and clung to me as if I were father, mother, and every thing to her. We took the name of Weston, and have gone by that name ever since. Well, then, as soon as my business with the jewellers was finished, I cast about what to do for her, for as I said she enjoyed

very indifferent health. A London doctor advised her wintering at Torquay, so to Torquay I took her, and placed her with some respectable folk. Then after investing my money in railway stock, in Lucy's and my own name, so as to make sure of some provision for her, I took leave of her with many tears, and sailed for New York in an American liner.

“I was not very fortunate in Yankee land, though I will not trouble you with all my adventures. Suffice it to say, I left it no poorer and no richer than I went, except I had laid in a stock of democratic notions, and got a knack of speechifying, and giving lectures to the ‘million,’ which puffed me up, and made me mightily conceited, but did not do me much good else. For, after all, my heart was not in the cause. I talked for talking's sake, or to scrape together a little dirty lucre. So when, no great while ago, I was ducked and pelted by the Rentworth rioters, trust me, Mr. Lovell, if my democratic sympathies did not evaporate like the snuff of a farthing candle! I honour a hearty thoroughbred democrat; but, to tell the truth, I was rather a humbug, and I fear there are many more cattle of the same breed.

“But, to proceed. I had other reasons besides my bad fortune for coming home. Lucy was going out to service as a ladies' maid, and I was resolved in my mind to see her again, not knowing whither she might be carried. Another thing was, that I read in

the newspapers—I was always a careful reader of newspapers—that Mr. Clinton's elder brother Philip, Sir Lawrence's son and heir, had died at Madeira, leaving only daughters, and no son. Then it struck me that my late master's, Mr. Clinton's, prospects would be altogether changed, and that something very important might come of it.

“So I found my way back to England, and frequented some of my old haunts; places where couriers and such like get together, and amuse themselves with discussing their masters' affairs. And thus I learnt that Mr. Clinton when last heard of was going on in his old courses, and had quite broken with Sir Lawrence. For a while I put the matter aside, and went down to see Lucy. She was in service with a family named Fazackerley, who resided near Torquay. Now, I had not been long in that neighbourhood when news reached me from more than one quarter, that Mr. Clinton had been very ill, and was a changed sort of a man. One said he was going into a monastery, another that he was on his way home, and was expected at Llanellesmere. Then I made sure there would be inquiry made about the boy, and off I started to find out the Harrills, who you know had charge of him. I didn't go near Dr. Crayfoot, you may be sure; but having had a hint from Harrill, that he would not go far from Clawthorp in case he should be wanted, I poked about in the neighbourhood, and after some trouble found Harrill was living at Okenham.

“Now Jack Harrill had gone from bad to worse, and was a thoroughly drunken, worthless fellow. He ill-treated his poor wife, and she had a hard matter to find food for the children. I did not much fancy showing myself, but thought it best to make sure that the boy Edward was all right. I looked in when Harrill was out of the way, and should have recognized the boy by his likeness to his mother. He had just her eyes and expression. Well, I had a talk with Mrs. Harrill, and sitting down tried to make friends with Edward. Strange to say the boy shrunk from me as if I were a viper! I could just notice, however, the scar on his forehead, and altogether felt quite satisfied, and was for making off as quietly as I came. But, as ill-luck would have it, before I had got clear of the village, whom should I meet but Jack Harrill with a gun on his shoulder, and as ill luck would have it, pretty sober. I tried to slip by unobserved, but my crossing the road raised his curiosity, and he strode straight up to me and asked me, face to face, whether I had seen any birds. Then he recognised, or, as he would say, ‘twigged’ me in a moment, and I felt it was no use denying who I was. Though, if I had only known all the misery the fellow has caused me since, I would have run for it, even at the risk of his firing his gun after me! At first he was mighty civil. But by degrees I found I was in his power, and what was worse he knew it well; for *he* was poor and reckless, whilst *I* had remains of respecta-

bility about me, and something to lose into the bargain. So I took him partly into my secret, and proposed to turn the boy Edward to advantage. To this he was very agreeable, but meantime was always trying to get cash out of me, and the moment he got half a sovereign, it was turned into liquor at the beer-shop.

"I felt in a great fix, having Lucy on my hands, and this the fellow knew well enough. I had Lucy on my hands, and dared not leave the country again; for I feared the whole thing would be exploded, and we should be tracked. So I got Lucy into Lady Maud's family to wait on the young ladies, and resolved to keep in the neighbourhood and bide my time, hoping to make something out of Edward by and bye. For you see all the money I had was the £500 in railway stock between Lucy and me, and I was very anxious to better my fortunes for Lucy's sake, and then, if Lucy got stronger, take ship to Australia or elsewhere.

"I turned a little money, and but a little, by quack-doctoring and writing letters for country folk, miners and what not. Then, as you know, I tried to raise a trifle by lecturing at pot-houses and elsewhere in the neighbourhood, but it was sorry work.

"Soon after, Lucy, as you remember, fell ill, and I had to take her home for a while. Else I think I should have started again, so worried was I by this fellow Harrill's importunities. Then came Mrs. Harrill's death; and, whilst I was thinking what I had best do with the

boy, Harrill one morning started away with him to Rentworth and took to the mines, leaving his own children chargeable to the parish. This was cool, to say the least of it, and I thought my best course was quietly to set the parish officers after him. But before he could be caught there came the Rentworth riots, and this upset all my plans for some time. The fellow, as you know, was a good deal implicated in these riots, and had to run for it, and skulk out of sight, nobody knew where. What became of the boy Edward I did not know, and feared Harrill had carried him off with him. But, by dint of ferreting about in all directions, I tracked the lad to Flintwood workhouse, and felt quite thankful he was in so snug a place, where he was under my thumb whenever I wanted him. I visited the lad once, and once only; for I found he hated me like poison, and that the less he saw of me the better for my plans. So I sent a present of green tea, or Jamaica ginger, or French brandy, to the matron now and then, and asked her to be his friend, and to let me know the moment he was likely to leave. Mrs. Medley was an ignorant body, but she was kind-hearted, and took the boy's part as much as she could, till I put her up to asking Mr. Nugent to take him in hand, or do something for him. For I thought, now that Lucy's young lady, Miss Usherwood, had married Squire Nugent, it would be a famous move to get Edward into their household, where he would be under Lucy's eye,

and she would be able to keep me informed of all his goings-on. Not that Lucy knew any thing about Edward. It was her habit to obey me without questioning or doubting. Well, it seems my plans worked as I wished, though it was labour lost as far as I was concerned; but that's all over now.

“It was whilst Harrill was keeping close to avoid the warrants out against him, that I learnt how old Sir Lawrence was dead, and my master, now Sir Reginald Clinton, was in England, and quite an altered man. Soon after an advertisement came out in the *Times*, which sent the blood into my face, I can tell you. It was signed R. C., and from the drift of it I knew at once it was from my old master.

“Now, I could not be sure how Sir Reginald would stand the shocking tale I should have to tell him about his poor lady, and my first notion was to get rid of Harrill, by bribing him to leave the country, so that I might remain master of the field.”

We will pass over Winthrop's account of the adventure at the river mouth, and Harrill's death, as well as the unexpected rencontre with Clinton.

“You see, Mr. Lovell, though Jack Harrill was gone, there was still Dr. Crayfoot left, and I thought it the wisest course to go and make terms with him, that he might hold his tongue when necessary, or at all events put as good a colour upon the business as was possible. Also, I was anxious to get plenty of proof of

the boy's identity, and thought the doctor might have property of the mother which would serve for this purpose. But the doctor had been a deal too crafty for that. All that was valuable had been sold; all that was worthless destroyed. What remained, then, is or was in Lucy's care; namely, the books Mrs. Clinton carried away in her hurried flight, the miniature of Sir Reginald, a few letters, and the rosary I gave to Harrill, which was found on him when the body was drawn out of the river.

"It was this visit to Dr. Crayfoot which is the cause of my lying here, a poor shattered creature, with a hole right through my skull! But I deserve it all, every bit, and far worse. Only I wish to say, that had I not been hampered by Harrill first, and then by Dr. Crayfoot, I think I should have gone to work more straightforward with Sir Reginald, and made a clean breast of it, so far at least as to tell him his boy was alive and where he could be found.

"Well, you want to know how I came by this sad accident. I cannot but believe it was only two or three days ago. I had had a fright, you see, from stumbling upon Mr. Nugent out in the yard yonder, after the visitors had been their rounds. He charged me point-blank with being concerned with Harrill in breaking down the dam at the river-mouth, some one having seen us together that day; and though I worked upon him so far as to persuade him to let me go for the nonce,

I feared lest being a conscientious sort of a man, he might change his mind when he came to reflect upon it. So I resolved to make myself scarce till the affair should blow over. I took some refreshment in the doctor's parlour, and was hastening towards the back-door leading out into the yard, when I remembered I had left an overcoat the doctor had given me in the room where I had slept the night before. I could not well afford to lose it, so I stepped up stairs as nimbly as I could to fetch it.

"Now, at the top of the first flight of stairs, there is a passage into which the ladies' apartments open, and the very first room on the right hand side is the room where the poor lady Mrs. Clinton, or Signora Bianchi, as she was called here, breathed her last. As I passed the entrance of the passage, I noticed that the door of this room was ajar. I thought this strange, because I had heard it had been shut up ever since the poor lady's death, owing to the servants hearing strange noises there. Well, I cannot explain why, but when I saw the door ajar an impulse seized me to push it open and look in. It was that sort of yearning we sometimes feel to have a look at some horrid object, such as a mutilated corpse or what not. Now the passage, and indeed all that part of the house, was unusually quiet. I heard an old clock ticking somewhere on the stairs, and a faint low murmur at the other end of the building. The passage was badly lighted, and the further end was a mass of gloom,

except where a chink of light came through the door I have been speaking of. Well, as I said, I was somehow fascinated, or, as you might say, spellbound. I walked forwards, pushed open the door, and took a peep into the room.

“It was very dreary and desolate. The few articles of furniture were covered with dust, and a cobweb stretched across the curtainless bed-posts. I noticed, however, a chest of drawers at the end of the room, and it struck me I might find something connected with my poor Signora, some stray article of dress, or what not. I entered the room, and went towards it. No sooner, however, was I fairly in the room, than I heard a gurgling, guttural laugh behind me, and something in a long robe moved out from behind the door I had just opened. I did not stop to think, but in a frenzy of fear sprang to the window which chanced to be partly open. I had a vague notion that the sill was not more than fifteen or twenty feet from the level of the garden below; but had it been a hundred I believe I should have made a rush for it all the same.

“My intention, so far as I was able to form any intention at all, was to let myself down by hanging by my arms, and drop to the ground beneath. But I was barely on the window sill when a hot dry hand clutched hold of my neck, and something like a face looked over my shoulder, whilst a yell rang in my ear loud enough to deafen me. Whether I was flung out of window, or

whether I fell out, cannot now be known. The strange thing is, that when I was picked up my own hand was found tightly clutched round my throat, and no one could be found in the room from which I had just been precipitated, nor was any of the patients missing. Dr. Crayfoot gave out it was a poor man, named Miller, one of the patients, who had concealed himself behind the door, and then made a rush at me. But the people of the house, so Lucy tells me, declare Miller was sound asleep in bed. However that may be, it was a moment of frightful agony for me, which I would not for worlds endure again.

“I spun out of window like a wheel, and thought I was a dead man. A second or two passed before I reached the ground, but it seemed two or three minutes. Then came a crash, and all was dark.

“Next moment, as it seemed, I was trying to sit up in this bed where I now lie, with a curious cramped feeling all over me, great weakness in my limbs, and a dull pain in my head, whilst Doctor Grierson and the nurses and a strange gentleman or two, were standing round my bed, watching me as if I were something curious on the shelf of a museum. And now I am pretty well exhausted with so much talking, and will by your leave try to get some sleep, hoping you will come to me again, sir, and read to me as you used to my sister when she was so ill.”

CHAPTER XIII.

TO AND FRO.

IN communicating the substance of Winthrop's narrative to Clinton, Lovell would have passed lightly over the more painful features, not wishing at such a moment to cause unnecessary pain. But the latter would permit nothing to be softened, nothing concealed, preferring to drain the cup to the dregs, nor spare himself one pang of humiliation, one shudder of remorse.

They started for London by the mail train that same night, after an hour or two's conversation in the inn at Rentworth. Lovell had heard nothing of Nugent or of the Usherwoods for the last fortnight or so, except the one fact that Mr. Usherwood was no more, and that his end had been peaceful and resigned. So he took for granted that Edward Harrill was still with the Nugents in Upper Grosvenor Street, and that the sooner Sir Reginald and himself reached town the better. They took Lucy Winthrop with them, but left Mr. Nutt at Clawthorp, with instructions to remove her brother to Okenham rectory as soon as Grierson thought him able to bear the motion of a carriage.

We need not dwell long on Sir Reginald Clinton's state of mind during that journey to London. Old recollections had been revived; old wounds torn open; scenes of the past unfolded to his gaze; deeds of guilt, that he had thought were repented of and forgiven, clamoured once more at the gate of conscience, and demanded a fuller and more perfect expiation.

Lovell had tact and sympathy in dealing with those in real affliction; and, notwithstanding his companion's sensitive and excitable nature, before half the journey was concluded, had gained his confidence almost without seeking it. Clinton probably told more of the secret workings of his mind to this Protestant clergyman than he had ever done to a priest of his own communion. He revealed many particulars of his personal history. He confessed that, when Mrs. Clinton and the boy were fairly gone, he had no desire to bring them back again. Living a life of excitement, impatient of all restraint, it was a relief to be freed from domestic anxieties. A little remorse just ruffled the surface of his mind, and then he busied himself once more in the unscrupulous pursuit of pleasure.

Finding from his bankers that Mrs. Clinton had drawn the money he had placed to her credit; and hearing from Winthrop that she had, in compliance with the latter's urgent representations, abandoned her intention of appealing to Sir Lawrence, and purposed

returning with Edward to France, Clinton felt tolerably at his ease on the subject. He wrote to his bankers, directing them to honour her quarterly drafts to a certain amount; acquainted her by letter with what he had done; assured her he should treat her with the same liberality as long as she gave him no reason to complain of her conduct. Afterwards, probably through some contrivance of Winthrop, information came to him from different quarters, that Mrs. Clinton was leading a life of doubtful morality at Rouen or Havre. He heard this with a kind of bitter satisfaction, and tried to banish all recollection both of mother and child.

Winthrop's sudden retirement from his service, coupled with the fact that the quarterly allowance payable at the bankers was not claimed, roused, however, a passing suspicion in Clinton's mind. Could there have been foul play? He did not believe Winthrop capable of any worse crime than dishonesty. But the total silence of the boy's mother did give him disquietude. He satisfied his conscience by writing letters of inquiry both to London and Rouen; but no clue to the whereabouts of Mrs. Clinton and Edward, or of Winthrop, being discoverable, he put the matter aside, and continued to take his pleasure at one or other of the favourite places of resort in central or southern Italy.

Then a few years afterwards came a great shock, which, for almost the first time in his life, awoke a feeling of contrition in his heart. One whom he

loved with all the ardour of which his nature was capable—the same lady referred to by Winthrop, against whom Mrs. Clinton's jealous indignation had not unreasonably been kindled—perished under his very eyes. The carriage in which he was driving her home one dark night, was upset against a bank by the roadside in the environs of Lucca. He himself was little injured, but his companion fell with her head upon a projecting fragment of rock, and, when he raised her from the ground, she was a corpse.

From that time his spirit began to be faintly stirred. Thoughts thrilled through his mind, and, though repulsed, would persist in returning unbidden. Outside the artificial world in which he lived, flashed distant glimpses of something purer, nobler, and more true. Here and there the dense lurid storm-clouds split apart, and for an instant peace and sunshine gleamed through them—then were gone. Still, to casual observers, his course was much the same as heretofore. Only himself knew that a strife was beginning within him, and that he was no longer permitted to sin in tranquillity and comfort. So it went on till sharp disease seized his whole frame, laid him prostrate for months, brought him to the very brink of the grave. Many were the visions which then slowly passed before his mind's eye—cold, grim, ghastly, they crowded day and night the chambers of his mind. At first, he writhed and strove to shut them out; but at length

accepted the infliction in patience and self-abasement, and from that time all was not horror and bitterness. There came snatches of consolation, whispers of hope and encouragement.

Nevertheless, brooding over the past history of his life, conscience would harass him with questions such as these:—"What if his wife should be still alive? What if she should be living in misery or in sin?" "However much she may have been to blame, were your own hands clean? At whose door lies the deepest guilt?" And again:—"What has become of that unfortunate child? At whose hands would its blood be required, if it has come to harm?" "You profess contrition for the past. Then devote yourself to undoing the past so far as lies in your power. You yearn for some means of proving your gratitude for unmerited mercy. Here, then, is a work ready for you. Nay, a work which you cannot neglect without drawing down the wrath of Heaven upon your head."

Thus, with returning health, Clinton's first and most anxious thought was to set on foot inquiries after the wife whom he had once passionately loved, and the child who had been an innocent sufferer from the animosity of his parents. But, after the lapse of nine or ten years, such inquiries must often be unsuccessful. More especially must this be the case, when conducted secretly and under the seal of confidence. The best chance of obtaining information would have been to

state the facts broadly in the public prints. This would have elicited communications from a variety of quarters, and have speedily led to the discovery that Edward Harrill was no other than Sir Reginald Clinton's long-lost son. But, with all his anxiety to do what was right, Clinton shrank from giving publicity to so painful a passage in his history. If the worst came to the worst, if private inquiries were fruitless and without result, he was resolved to do so. But this was reserved for a last resource.

In this way, Clinton briefly narrated to Lovell his thoughts, feelings, and experiences during the last few years. From thence he passed to his son Edward, now, as he trusted, about to be restored to him.

Lovell gave him the fullest information he could relative to Edward's character, disposition, abilities, &c. Then they touched on the question of religion. Edward had of course been brought up a Protestant. He had not yet been confirmed, but Lovell had begun reading with him in preparation for the bishop's triennial visit.

No doubt all this, Lovell thought, would be now changed. The lad would be handed over to a Romish priest, and taught to loathe the teaching he had been hitherto urged to respect.

He felt, however, agreeably surprised when Clinton, in a quiet voice, intimated he should strongly object to trample the boy's religious convictions under

foot, imperfect though he might deem them, and infuse into his mind by a sort of mechanical process—as you would charge an electric battery or load a fowling-piece—doctrines, some strange to him, some opposed to all his existing notions.

He asked—

“Has my poor boy, however self-willed and excitable, any feeling of his own shortcomings—any yearning after purity of heart and newness of spirit—any reliance, however faint and imperfect, on the revealed word of God?”

Lovell was convinced that religion had a place in his thoughts, and that the instructions imparted to him had not been thrown away.

“Then I should recoil from undoing any of this good work. The wheat would be pulled up with the tares. Whatever forms and decorations, whatever props and bulwarks, a Christian church may incorporate with its creeds and liturgies, and gather round its fabric in the progress of ages, the vital question is and ever must be this:—‘Has that church within her inmost sanctuary enough of the essence of our common faith to save a man’s soul from perdition—enable him to make his peace with God, and walk accordingly?’ No,” he added, decisively—“Edward shall not be wrenched out of your church by sheer force. Who can tell if the tender plant would take root elsewhere?”

"This will rejoice Nugent," replied Lovell. "He loves the lad almost as a son."

Clinton sighed.

"Yes, Lovell, so it is in this life. The joys of one are the sorrows of another! It is one proof amongst many, that human life is imperfect, disjointed, unsatisfying, not to be explained by any other conceivable theory than that of the religion of Christ."

"Nugent," continued Lovell after a pause, "has so honest and warm a heart, that after the first pang, he will rejoice as much as any one in Edward's restoration to you."

"He never asked me to his house from the first moment I knew him! I know not whether it was from Protestant scruples or from another cause. Yet he was friendly when we met, and would accompany me, and allow Mrs. Nugent to accompany me, in rides, or drives, or walks."

"Oh! his strong religious prejudices," rejoined Lovell, "made him cautious of admitting you into his family."

"I am going to ask rather a strange question," Clinton went on; "but do you think Nugent of a jealous disposition?"

"Not more than any body else," rejoined Lovell.

Clinton made no reply, and Lovell added, as if by way of qualification—

"That is to say, he is not a man to be jealous in a hurry, and without good grounds."

“Or what he thinks good grounds?”

“Just so.”

“Those are the very men,” observed Clinton, “who, when they think they have what you call ‘good grounds,’ evince the wildest and most extravagant jealousy. The remembrance of the confidence they have placed in one they now believe faithless, envenoms the wound. But here we are at Euston Square! We will start for Grosvenor Street immediately.”

Lovell suggested that it was yet very early; but his companion was too impatient to wait until the morning was further advanced, and, procuring a carriage, the party started forthwith.

A yellow fog, such as we seldom see but in London, enveloped the streets, as they drove along at a pace much slower than Clinton could have wished. The air felt chilly, and an involuntary feeling of anxiety and depression began to steal over his mind. It is the natural sensation arising from suspense, and, when followed by calamity, we term it a foreboding of evil; when followed by peace or joy, we entirely forget we experienced it. Clinton, then, sat back in the carriage in an anxious disturbed state of mind, vexed at the slow rate at which they were driven, and yet half dreading the moment when they should arrive.

Suddenly, however, the cab stopped at the end of Grosvenor Street. Clinton pulled down the window, partly to give himself air, for he seemed to feel difficulty

in breathing, partly in order to open the door the moment the servants answered the bell. Once, twice, thrice, the cabman rang, and at length gave a thundering knock, but all to no purpose. The shutters were all closed. The blinds drawn down. Not a sound was heard in any part of the house. Clinton felt increased alarm and anxiety. Lovell suggested ringing several minutes without stopping. Lucy with an air of authority which at once carried weight with it, recommended that some one should go down the area steps and tap at the window of the pantry, where one of the servants always slept. This last advice was about to be complied with, when at that moment a window in an adjoining house was thrown up, and an angry old gentleman, who seemed to have been rudely disturbed from sleep, put out a night-capped head, and exclaimed in a loud testy voice—"No use you're knocking and ringing at that rate, cabman. No use on earth. Family's all left town a week ago!" And so saying down went the window with a crash, that seemed perfectly spiteful.

Clinton sank back in the cab. Lucy declared it must be a mistake. Lovell, who had caught a glimpse of a distant policeman, sprang out of the cab, and darted off in the hope of getting out of him some more definite information. Presently he returned, exclaiming, "It's all right! They are at Lady Maud's, number fifty; how stupid of me not to think of it! Of course, they have gone to keep Lady Maud company." They

drove on to number fifty. For some distance in front of the house the road was covered by a thick layer of straw, and the knocker of the door had been unscrewed and removed. "I wonder," said Lovell, "that they have not removed the straw yet. Poor Usherwood has been dead these ten days!" "It looks fresh laid," said Clinton, with a vague feeling of uneasiness again creeping over him. "Something is the matter, you may be sure." The door was opened, as soon as the cabman rang, by a maid belonging to the lodging, who was scrubbing the passage inside. Clinton and Lovell sprang out, and hastened to the door. "Mr. and Mrs. Nugent are staying here, are they not?" The servant stared stupidly, and replied—"Mr. Nugent baint here at all, and Mrs. Nugent she be very ill. But I was to say she was as well as could be expected."

And the woman stared more stupidly than before, and made a movement as if she was going to shut the door. But Lucy by this time had sprung down from the box of the cab, and, gliding into the passage, commenced a series of rapid interrogatories, which had the effect at all events of thoroughly waking the woman up, and putting Lucy in possession of the facts.

She came back to the cab, and said the two gentlemen had best come into the house, and wait till the young ladies or Lady Maud were down-stairs, when they could find out where Mr. Nugent was gone to. So they dismissed the cab, and entered into the house,

whilst Lucy, having showed them into the dining-room, ran down-stairs to get them some coffee.

Mrs. Nugent had been taken ill a few days since, and it appeared that letters had been sent down to Clawthorp summoning Lucy to London, and also to Mrs. Grierson requesting her to accompany her. As for Nugent, he had left town with Edward ten days ago, and nothing was precisely known of his whereabouts amongst the servants. There was no help but to wait until the ladies came down-stairs.

They had scarcely, however, drank their coffee, when word came that Lady Maud was in the drawing-room, and would be glad to see Mr. Lovell. He hastened up-stairs, and was met by Lady Maud with both hands extended. He was grieved to see the change which grief and watching had wrought in her appearance.

"Sit down, Mr. Lovell!" she said; "sit down! I am too weak to talk standing. Do you know any thing of this dreadful affair?"

"Do you mean poor Mrs. Nugent's illness? I am very sorry——"

"Gertrude's illness? No, not that! Of course I am very sorry, but there is no reason she should not soon be well again. The only difficulty is the excitement and anguish of mind from which she is suffering."

"What has happened, then? I am quite in the dark."

"Oh! then you don't know, Mr. Lovell. Well, it is a

great calamity, and I will have no concealments from you, for you are an old friend. An old friend," added Lady Maud with an attempt at a smile, "and I think a good friend," extending her hand, and holding his for a second or two.

"I desire to be so, believe me, Lady Maud."

"It is the most extraordinary thing that ever was known," continued Lady Maud pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. "I believe my darling Gertrude has been cruelly maligned, cruelly and basely maligned. And Nugent has acted brutally in believing the scandal, and deserting her in the midst of affliction, just after her dear father's death. She has no one to protect her now!"

And Lady Maud shed a few tears, which were probably genuine.

"Explain, Lady Maud, I beseech you!"

She held two or three letters in her hand, and with unwonted agitation of manner put one of them hastily in his hand, exclaiming—

"Read this, Mr. Lovell! I give it to you of course in confidence, for the contents are most painful. It gave her a great shock, though I think she will not permanently suffer."

Meantime Lovell commenced reading. Something in his countenance caught Lady Maud's quick eye. He appeared not so much distressed as altogether confounded and puzzled. She glanced at the letters in

her hand, then with the speed of lightning snatched the letter from Lovell's hands with, "A thousand pardons, dear Mr. Lovell! I gave you a stupid business letter by mistake. This is the one I wished you to read. 'Tis from Nugent."

Lovell looked much relieved, for he certainly did not make out why he was to read the letter just snatched from him. It appeared to be from Mr. Usherwood, explaining a codicil he had added to his will, appointing two trustees, with directions to apply a certain sum, now standing in Mr. Usherwood's name in reduced three per cents., to the benefit of Lady Maud for her life, and whether she re-married or not. Then followed some allusions to their daughter Agatha, and an intimation that he had left this amount to Lady Maud unconditionally, because he would not show any want of confidence in her regard for his wishes; but in the hope and expectation that she would faithfully act upon those wishes expressed to her more than once when he knew that he was a dying man.

All this Lovell very imperfectly comprehended, and took for granted, as Lady Maud told him, that it was "a stupid business letter." A business letter it might be; but Lovell, had he known the real drift of it, would have been the last person to consider it stupid.

Lovell then took the letter tendered to him in exchange, and sitting down commenced reading it with feelings of mingled surprise and pain. This letter,

received by Gertrude on the day of the funeral, the reader has already seen.

Lovell had not read far, when, perceiving the letter was long, he asked Lady Maud whether it might not be well to invite Sir Reginald up-stairs. He was waiting below in some suspense.

"I think not," was Lady Maud's reply. "You will see that that letter concerns him. Moreover, Gertrude must not know he is in the house. She made me promise he should not be admitted. I will go to him, and say a few words whilst you are finishing the letter."

She found Clinton walking up and down the dining-room, in much anxiety.

His first question on Lady Maud's entrance was—

"Where is Nugent? Where is Edward? What is the reason of their sudden and mysterious disappearance?"

"Sit down, dear Sir Reginald—sit down! I have much to say to you. I wish to speak to you without reserve." Lady Maud led him to a sofa, and sat down beside him. "Give me your confidence, Reginald, as in the days of your boyhood, when I was young and beautiful."

Here her eyes lighted up by a faint gleam of tenderness, and rested on Sir Reginald's careworn countenance. "You are not happy, Reginald; your mind is ill at ease. You, too, have experienced some new and bitter anxiety. Tell me now! Speak openly, as to an

elder sister—as to a mother. Has Gertrude any thing to do with your trouble?”

Clinton, gently disentwining his hand from the grasp of Lady Maud’s soft taper fingers, rose from the sofa somewhat abruptly, and recommenced pacing the room. His handsome countenance wore an expression of annoyance and embarrassment.

“I admit,” he at length said—“I admit that my past career lays me justly open to suspicion at every turn. But I did not expect, Maud, that you would judge me as the world judges those who have once erred; namely, once guilty—always guilty!”

Lady Maud felt relieved. Accustomed to read the thoughts of others, she was favourably impressed by his tone and manner, and her countenance brightened. Clinton resumed—

“I have been to blame. I have been selfishly greedy for sympathy, for pity, for consolation! Yet at length I saw my danger. I saw it, as I trusted, before harm had been inflicted in any quarter. I saw it, and drew back. But it would seem from your words, and from your manner, that mischief is already done. If so, I am indeed most miserable!”

Lady Maud approached him, and was once more about to speak, when the door was thrown open, and Lovell, flushed with excitement, entered the room, followed by Lucy Winthrop.

"Lady Maud, it can all be explained ! I am sure it can. Here's Lucy ; let her tell her story !"

"What can be explained, my good Lovell ?" asked Clinton in some perplexity.

"Why, the parcel of books—the rosary—the miniature ! Lucy had charge of them. Not that she knew any thing of them. They were made up in a parcel and given her by her brother. It was she that concealed them. Sit down, Lucy, and tell them all about it ! You see, Lady Maud, the poor girl is excited. She has not the command of nerve that we men possess."

And Lovell, by way of proving his command of nerve, placed a chair for Lucy with so much vehemence, that the back rail came off in his hand.

The explanation of the parcel and its contents led the way, as a matter of course, to the revelations made by George Winthrop, and the identification of Edward as Sir Reginald's missing son.

Where, however, was Edward now ? or rather where was Nugent ? for doubtless they were together. As far as Lady Maud had been able to gather from the solicitor, who, in compliance with Gertrude's instructions, had been applied to for information, Nugent was now, or would be very shortly, at the seaport town of Avonsbury, where it was anticipated he would remain a few days, and again communicate with Gertrude and Lady Maud. His plans the solicitor professed not to know any thing about, although, when hard pressed, he let out

that Nugent, when he last heard from him, seemed to harbour some idea of emigrating to Canada or Australia. Sir Reginald and Lovell were eager to start for Avonsbury without delay, but there was no train for a couple of hours. Sir Reginald therefore determined to drive home and answer any letters received in his absence, with the intention of calling for Lovell on his way to Paddington.

Meanwhile, Lady Maud and Lovell, having returned to the drawing-room, continued to converse on the events of the last few days. Time wore on, and it now wanted but half an hour of the time when Clinton promised to call.

Then Lady Maud, her pale cheeks gradually becoming a delicate pink, said, with a little hesitation—

“ One word, Mr. Lovell, on a subject very interesting to me. When you spoke to me at Beaumont, with reference to dearest Agatha, I answered you ambiguously. My mind was at ease, and I had many projects. Now, all is changed! I have seen the gradual shipwreck of my daughter's happiness in despite of my own anxious, and I think judicious, interference”—here the delicate pink became a soft moss-rose—“Then came my husband's illness. Then his sudden decease, that, notwithstanding frequent warnings, came upon me at last with startling severity. Truly he was a generous, humble-minded, warm-hearted creature! Well, Mr. Lovell, next all unawares comes this new and terrible blow.

Gertude traduced, spurned, and abandoned ! This is the crowning trial. For the first time, my heart feels a vague longing for peace. I have no wish to struggle against destiny. Do not misunderstand me, Mr. Lovell. You are by no means pledged to Agatha. All I wish to say is this—that I shall no longer be an obstacle to your union.”

Lady Maud leaned back in her chair, wearied with her long explanation. But the words were scarcely out of her mouth before Lovell had her hand to his lips, and kissed it with a sort of reverential gratitude, which, in that lady’s weak state of health, she felt rather touching. She looked at him kindly, and dreams of early passages in her own life flitted faintly through her mind, *blazé* as we fear it was, like the mirage sweeping over the waters of the Mediterranean. She looked at him kindly, and said with gentleness—

“Would you like to see Agatha for a moment or two before you leave town ?”

“Dearest Lady Maud, of all things !”

Nevertheless, though Lovell spoke with the greatest alacrity, so soon as Lady Maud left the room and returned, saying, “Agatha was down-stairs, and would speak to him for a few minutes in the dining-room,” he exhibited decided symptoms of embarrassment, and threw out hints as to the importance of not losing any time, and about Clinton’s great anxiety to start at once. Seemingly Lady Maud put her

own construction upon these manifestations. She led him gently down-stairs, and quietly admitting him into the room where Agatha was sitting, closed the door, and left them alone.

Agatha was, of course, in deep mourning. She rose with a blush to meet Lovell, and, after shaking hands, they commenced a rather dry discussion as to the probability of the weather remaining fine.

This continued for a minute or two; then there was a pause. Lovell took out his watch, and began with some slight trepidation of manner to back towards the door. Agatha extended her hand, and, as he pressed it deferentially, there was a shy kind of gleam out of her dark hazel eye which found its way into Lovell's heart, and drove the colour from his cheek. He kept her hand, and murmured a few words of passionate affection.

But Agatha now drew back, and said in a voice which slightly trembled from emotion—

“This is not a time, Mr. Lovell, to speak to me in this way. This is a house of mourning and affliction!”

“I hope I have not offended you?” Lovell answered, turning crimson with shame and self-reproach.

Agatha looked in his face, and Lovell knew that no harm had been done.

“We shall meet again soon,” she said, and was gliding from the room.

“But tell me if I may hope? Do not leave me without a word or look of encouragement!”

“Do you need it? Have you so little confidence in me?” she answered. And, with something like a smile, she looked one moment in his face, and then was gone.

Late in the evening, Clinton and Lovell drove up to the White Horse Hotel at Avonsbury, and, having engaged rooms, started forth to inquire at the post-office for Nugent’s direction.

Nothing was known, however, of his whereabouts. Some one had twice that day inquired about letters for Oliver Nugent, but no address had been left. Lovell, therefore, wrote a few lines on a piece of paper at the post-office, requesting Nugent to come to him at the White Horse, as he had important and satisfactory information to communicate to him.

To-morrow was Sunday, and until Monday, therefore, no letters were delivered at the post-office. The suspense and anxiety were great but unavoidable. Possibly at one or other of the churches, during divine service next day, either Lovell or Clinton might be fortunate enough to fall in with Nugent. Consoling themselves, therefore, with this hope, they returned to their hotel, ordered refreshments of which they stood much in need, and retired early to rest.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MEETING.

IT was Sunday morning, and the streets, squares, bridges, and quays of Avonsbury, re-echoing a few hours before with the heterogeneous hubbub of a busy seaport and a populous city, were now wrapped in drowsy tranquillity. The stagnant waters of the extensive docks were shrouded in a white motionless fog, so that only the masts and spars of the innumerable vessels moored there were visible, the hulls being as it were buried and submerged in vapour. But where the river wound its way slowly and lazily along its muddy bed, the fog was less dense. You saw the slimy sides of weatherbeaten ships lying aground against the silent quays on either shore, where they had been unlading the previous day. You saw the faintest possible ripple in that slow-moving stream. You perceived upon its greasy surface, floating in a leisurely sort of way, indications of the vicinity of a large town. The carcasses of dogs or pigs—kittens, over whose premature and ruthless destruction the tears of tender-hearted children had been profusely shed—skins of oranges

flung from the back premises of a fruit warehouse, gleaming palely-bright, outcasts from the garden of the Hesperides—then an ancient battered wine-cask, once charged with heart-cheering port that oozed in fragrant dew through its venerable seams, now scornfully abandoned according to man's usual practice towards those who have ceased to be serviceable; then a shoal of smaller articles, old shoes, empty bottles, fragments of various coloured cloth—then a half-burnt plank of wood charred and black—then the tattered remnant of a lady's bonnet.

That poor little waif, last mentioned, might have told a melancholy tale. Once it was worn by a sweet and lovely girl, tenderly beloved by her newly-married husband. How he admired it when she first put it on! But she sickened and died. The husband was half-mad with grief. The funeral arrangements were left to others. The young wife's wearing apparel was scrambled for by half a dozen hungry servants. The keen-eyed lady's-maid pounced upon the bonnet. She went to church in it as soon as she had worn out the mourning given her by her mistress's friends. How her ugly face smiled and simpered under the little head-dress which adorned, a few months before, that sweet innocent creature, now mouldering six feet under ground! The lady's-maid swapped it with an upper housemaid for a cast off crinoline petticoat. The upper housemaid pulled off the delicate pale-blue ribbons, and trimmed it afresh with staring

yellow and green. The poor bonnet felt it was going down in the world. Thence it passed to a slop-shop, where it was bought by an unfortunate girl for eighteen-pence, trimmings and all, and considered a bargain. Now its doom was soon settled. It changed hands or rather heads two or three times, till its last owner was carried to the city hospital mortally wounded by a drunken foreign sailor in a street row. Here, after her decease, the forsaken bonnet was flung out into the ash-pit. The scavenger one day in clearing out the pit caught sight of it, and holding it up betwixt his blackened thumb and finger, thought it would be just the thing to please his "old woman." So he put it on the top of the wall, meaning when he had filled his cart to carry it off to his wife. But fate had otherwise decreed. A puff of wind wandering by had compassion on the poor ill-used bonnet, and, blowing it off the wall, saved it from the ignominious lot in store for it. It fluttered in the air a little space, then descended lightly into the waters of the sluggish river below. The scavenger watched it for a moment with a disconcerted air, then scratched his head, and resumed his work. The bonnet floated slowly and peacefully out of sight.

Thus, leaning over the parapet of a quaint old bridge that spanned the river at a point where two or three long straggling streets met together—thus mused Oliver Nugent.

He was pale, almost haggard, and the few persons

who passed him in the quiet hush of an early Sabbath morning, looking at the deep mourning which he wore, deemed he was one suffering from recent bereavement; and, with that sort of respect which most of us feel for deep sorrow, withdrew their eyes from him as they came near, and perceptibly quickened their pace.

And from recent bereavement he was indeed suffering. Recent and most terrible; for though the wife whom he had held so precious—the Gertrude whom he had loved so dearly—was gone, was vanished for ever; yet, as it were, another wife—another Gertrude—survived to mock him by the contrast—a being the same in reality, yet utterly different in all those qualities that win affection and esteem—a phantom confronting him by day and by night, forbidding that wounded spirit to heal, or that wearied heart to take rest.

Better death than shame and dishonour. Better death than the rooting up of hope, and trust, and love. Better death than the disfigurement of what is pure and beautiful.

Thus, then, Nugent leant over the parapet of the old bridge at Avonsbury, a large seaport town on the west coast of England, and diverted his mind from haunting cares by musing on the scene around him.

Few sounds broke the stillness of that Sabbath morning. Now and then, on the deck of some distant ship, a lazy-looking sailor or cabin-boy would let down a bucket

into that muddy stream with a sullen splash, and then draw it up again full: not we trust for cooking purposes but for washing the deck. Now and then an upper casement of one of the picturesque gabled houses still lingering amongst the ugly structures of modern times that flanked the river-side, would open, and a pale face peer forth, breathe the raw misty air as if refreshed, and then withdraw. Now and then a solitary cab would rattle past, or lumbering dog-cart bearing into the country a smart linen-draper with his sweetheart, his sweetheart's sister, his sweetheart's mother, and his personal friend the hairdresser's young man. The dog-cart rumbles by, the echoes die away, and nothing remains but the smell of a bad cigar the hairdresser's young man was prevailed on to smoke because the ladies were so fond of it in the open air.

Presently Nugent's eye lighted upon a vessel of larger tonnage lying a few hundred yards down the river. It was a three-masted ship of heavy burden, and, by the look of the yards and rigging, it would seem the owners were preparing her for sea with all despatch.

Taking from his pocket an advertisement cut probably from a newspaper, Nugent listlessly examined it; now and then casting his eyes again towards the ship in the distance.

NOTICE!

**NOW LOADING AT AVONSBURY FOR
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The magnificent A 1 clipper Ship,
"PERKIN WARBECK,"
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Well and favourably known in the Trade.

This vessel has made the quickest passage on record, and her model is the most perfect of the day. She has a full poop, 55 feet long, her cabins are spacious and elegant, and her 'tween deck accommodation is unusually comfortable and airy, having 7 feet 6 inches clear space in height.

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SMIRKS & CO.,
The Quay, Avonsbury.

The chimes from an ancient church-tower, black with age and smoke, overlooking the water, now rang out the hour into the misty air, and Nugent hastily replaced the paper in his pocketbook, and leaving the bridge pursued his way along the quay, until he reached a long street of modern houses leading by a steep ascent to the upper part of the town. This locality, being more salubrious and less noisy, was the favourite resort of the wealthy and fashionable section of the population. The streets gradually broke into detached rows and crescents; these in their turn gave place to single villas standing in their own grounds. In this quarter of the town something of the gaiety and display of Brighton,

Clifton, or Cheltenham might be discerned. There were one or two promenades shaded by trees ; several fascinating shops ; a public library where nobody seemed to read any thing but the newspapers ; a museum so full of dust that economical old gentlemen looked in there instead of taking a pinch of snuff, whenever they wanted a good sneeze.

There was also a large commodious church crammed full every Sunday. The living was in the gift of the Procrustœan trustees. The Procrustœan trustees had given it to a clergyman who they thought precisely fitted their views. They had other livings in their gift. Therefore a number of far-sighted divines were always looking reverentially towards the Procrustœan trustees, and curtailing or elongating the proportions of their theology in an agonizing ambition to prove a "good fit." *Alias*, meet to a nicety the elaborate requirements the trustees exacted in addition to the tests afforded by the church of England's liturgy and articles.

Nugent climbed into the higher portion of the town and found his way to the church just referred to.

He had to wait till a good part of the service was completed, with his back to a wall amidst a crowd of strangers who, in common with himself, could not get places. Occasionally, when no lady required it, he rested on one of the chairs placed in the aisles, and at length, after the second lesson, was shown into a pew. The

ordinary worshippers of Upper Avonsbury are slightly oblivious of the injunction "not to be forgetful to entertain strangers," or they would perhaps make some better arrangement for their reception.

However, Nugent at length procured a seat. But even then his attention was a little distracted. Time and reflection had somewhat mellowed his views in religion. He was tolerably patient of High Church peculiarities, though he did not love them. But here in this Procrustæan church—this *beau-ideal* of theological perfection—he certainly seemed to detect a strong savour of—shall we breathe the awful word?—Puseyism! It was very easily explained. The incumbent on his first appointment fitted the Procrustæan bed to a T. He continued to fit it for some years. But one fine morning he awoke, and found the bed too short for him by—we do not know how much. So he eked it out by clapping on to the end of it the whole of the "Tracts for the Times," in a stiff mediæval binding. In short, the church was no longer a Procrustæan church at all! No wonder, therefore, Nugent was a little bewildered by the tone and style of the service. Still more was he startled when there rose up in the pulpit a man who seemed one of the ascetic monks of old, exhumed from some cave in the desert. He was worn, wrinkled, sallow. His eyes shone with a kind of cold dreamy lustre. A noble development of forehead surmounted, however, that wasted countenance, denot-

ing deep but perhaps not broad intellect; ardent self-devotion; aspiring faith. It was impossible for any one to see him and to forget him. Nugent gazed at him with involuntary attention. The figure began to address the congregation. His utterance was rapid, distinct, but monotonous as a passing bell. You fancied you would soon be weary, and looked up anxiously at the clock. But no; against your will the preacher clutched hold of your mind, closer, closer, closer. The stream of thoughts and images poured on in the same clear solemn monotone. Certainly Nugent had never felt so clearly the hatefulness of sin as now listening to this man; rarely had he felt so intimately persuaded of the reality of divine love; never had he more truly realized the awfulness of the Judgment. "After all," he said to himself—"Is not that earnest, ascetic man, feeble in body but strong in mind, a true fellow-soldier with those whose teaching I deem more full and more satisfying? Would not he and the most zealous of evangelical divines, in a time of fiery persecution, make common cause together and forget their differences? And what are the times we live in? Not of persecution, but perhaps worse—sly, sneering contempt, Julianic mockery—infidelity, not alone in holy things, but in the common innate laws of right and wrong—the revealed word in secret spurned—the existence of such a thing as virtue publicly scouted in popular novels and popular

lectures. Surely, what we want nowadays is earnestness. Earnestness with many errors, in preference to torpor with next to none! Life, however indocile or ungainly, in preference to a petrification cast in all the rules of art!"

Such were his thoughts as the preacher drew to a close. But at that moment they were swept from his mind by a sudden inroad of other emotions.

For, at a little distance from the pew where Nugent was sitting, he discerned the figure of a man bent forwards in deep attention to the preacher's words. The face was turned from him; but there was in his general appearance something Nugent could not mistake—a symmetry and a grace which would have been noticeable any where. A chill ran through his veins, but it was soon dispelled. It was his duty to confront that man, to speak to him words of solemn rebuke, of indignant remonstrance; nay, to take advantage of the slightest indication of hesitation or self-reproach on his part, and induce him, so far as lay in his power, to retrace his steps. All that Nugent feared was that Sir Reginald, as soon as he saw him, would again take flight.

The moment therefore the service was concluded, Nugent hastened as fast as the crowd permitted to the principal entrance of the church to stop him as he passed out.

But to his deep mortification Nugent found, as he passed the pew lately occupied by Clinton, that he had already

departed. Evidently, thought Nugent, he has seen me, and fled. Nevertheless, he pressed onwards, for possibly he might be able to track him on leaving the church.

He reached the entrance, passed out through the porch, and found himself face to face with Sir Reginald Clinton.

“Nugent!”

“Sir Reginald Clinton!”—simultaneously burst from their lips.

Before the latter had time to speak, Nugent, restraining the rush of bitter feelings which the sight of Clinton evoked, said, in a low emphatic voice—

“Sir Reginald, we must speak together in private. Lead the way to some spot where we shall be alone, and I will follow you.”

Clinton, without hesitation, turned, and walked onwards at a rapid pace to an open space of down, rising gradually from the outskirts of Avonsbury, until it attained a considerable eminence and then fell sheer in an almost perpendicular precipice into a ravine beneath, where ebbed and flowed the same river which Nugent had that morning been contemplating.

Here was comparative solitude; and the moment Clinton reached the upper part of the ground he turned to Nugent, who was following close behind, and exclaimed, in a voice of calm earnestness—

“Nugent, I rejoice from my heart I have found you!”

I rejoice on your own account equally as on mine, for I fear you have greatly suffered."

Nugent's anger rose.

"Dare you, sir, stand quietly before me, and, with shameless hypocrisy, affect to compassionate my sufferings? Who caused those sufferings? Who, with diabolical art, stole from me the affections of one I loved best in the world—one without whom life is a burden? What? You have corrupted—selfishly and cruelly corrupted—both her heart and her mind. You have drawn her from her true faith as a Christian, in order the easier to undermine her fidelity as a wife. You have slain and taken possession! First demoralized, then betrayed!"

Nugent spoke with such unusual vehemence that his companion could not at first arrest him. At length he interposed with——

"You condemn me unheard! Listen to me, and I will set your mind at rest. It is for that purpose I have sought you!"

"Sought me?" replied Nugent, with bitterness. "Did not you fly from the church the instant you caught sight of me?"

They were walking side by side at a slow pace, but both under the influence of strong emotion, and were now about ten yards from the precipice of which we have spoken.

"My sole object was to intercept you as you passed

out!" rejoined Clinton. "Now, listen, as you value your own happiness and Gertrude's——"

"Speak that name again, sir," exclaimed Nugent in fierce displeasure, "and I cannot answer for what I may do! You try me too far, sir. You suppose I am a Christian, and that my hands are therefore tied. May be so. But, let me tell you, if I do not challenge you to meet me face to face with any weapons you please, it is not because I fear death! No, sir!"

And, carried away by the strength of his passion, he clutched hold of Sir Reginald Clinton's wrist, and drew him forward a couple of paces with sudden but deliberate energy.

They were instantly upon the brink of the precipice. Sheer dropped the cliffs, without a check, three hundred feet from summit to base. On the other side of the river rose the opposite slope of the ravine, covered with the waving foliage of a wood that stretched for miles to right and left.

One step, and both would be dashed to pieces, limb by limb. Up blew the raw air of that dim foggy ravine over their faces, like the breath of some hungry monster panting for its prey. Clinton did not, as the reader has already seen, lack personal courage; nay, when occasion offered, could evince an heroic and unselfish ardour. But this was no common trial. Before him was a sudden and dreadful death. By his side a man almost distracted with grief and rage. To struggle to extricate

himself, to draw back, even to move, would have probably been the death of both. Clinton, therefore, stood motionless; but the perspiration stood in drops upon his forehead, and, amidst all the horror of the situation, he heard the loud beating of his heart.

A few seconds of inward strife, and Clinton nerved himself to speak, and to speak calmly and slowly—

“We are in the hands of a righteous Judge who reads the hearts of men, and in another moment may be before his throne. I call Him to witness I am innocent of the crimes you lay to my charge!”

Nugent heard, and whether he believed Clinton or not, the words touched a chord in his mind which restored him to himself. He seemed suddenly to recognise the peril they both were in, and with a shudder started back, drawing Clinton with him.

A sick and giddy feeling came over them. By common consent they hastened further from the cliffs, and silently sat down on one of the benches in the promenade.

“You deem my faith,” at length resumed Clinton, “overrun with errors of man’s invention. Possibly, you are not wholly wrong. Yet, how do you prove the superiority of your own? Refusing to hear me utter a word in my own defence, and risking both our lives by a display of reckless bravado!”

Nugent did not at first reply. He covered his face with his hands, and strove to attain a

patient spirit. Then he looked up, and said more quietly—

“What comfort can you bring me? How can you restore the peace you have trampled under foot? If *you* are less guilty than I believe, *she* is not so! A lying spirit and an impure heart! Oh, would that I had rather died than thought of marrying her! Perhaps, with one better suited to her disposition and tastes, she might have been happier; she might still have been pure. But I was too cold, too strict; did not endeavour to possess her heart before I tried to direct her conscience. Yes, I was wrong. Would that I had rather died!”

Clinton let his sorrow have way for a brief space, then interposed—

“Nugent, I appeal to you once more! Every thing can be explained!”

Nugent made a gesture of impatience.

“You have been deceived—you have wronged your wife. But you have done so ignorantly. No blame attaches to you. I, indeed, through the mysterious decrees of Providence, have been made the instrument of chastisement to others, but not in the manner you suppose. Your wife is innocent!”

“You may speak true or false,” rejoined Nugent. “I cannot read your thoughts. It is possible you may be less guilty than I thought; but, as for her, nothing can now make me believe her innocent!”

"What, not if I prove that she knew nothing of the books—of the parcel discovered in her room?"

Nugent started.

"You will not deny they were yours?" he added.

"They were so. But placed there, not by your wife, but by the hand of another. Attend to me, I beg!"

His companion began to listen more attentively, whilst a certain agitation of manner showed the strength of his convictions to be somewhat shaken.

"Sixteen years ago, I married an Italian lady whom I passionately loved. Our life was an unhappy one. We ceased to love. We quarrelled bitterly. I then found that our marriage had been informal, for I was under age at the time. In a moment of anger I vowed I would cancel it, and abandon both her and her child. She was wild with terror and indignation. She took the boy, and fled to England to appeal to my father. I despatched my servant, Winthrop, to persuade her to abandon her purpose. I sent her money, and promised more if she would leave me in peace. Winthrop overtook her. He remained with her, meaning to play the villain and rob her. Circumstances favoured his plans. My poor wife—for wife I shall ever regard her—showed symptoms of insanity. Perhaps with proper treatment she might have been restored. But it was the interest of those who had charge of her to destroy her reason, and not to preserve it. So, with cold-blooded and detestable wickedness, they hurried her from place to place, plied

her with pernicious drugs, robbed her of all she possessed, and lodged her in a lunatic asylum."

"Where?"

"At Clawthorp."

"And what of the child?" asked Nugent, eagerly.

"An accomplice of Winthrop had charge of him."

"Harrill!" exclaimed Nugent.

"He went by that name at Okenham. Time passed on. I returned to England conscience-stricken, penitent, yearning to discover those whom my misconduct had driven forth into the world, yearning to do tardy justice both by mother and child. They could nowhere be found!"

"Why conduct your inquiries so secretly?" interrupted Nugent; "Why not have placed confidence in me? What might have been spared to all of us if you had done so!"

"I was to blame. I shrank from making my history public to the world. And as for yourself—you seemed to hold my creed in such detestation that I felt there was an impassable barrier between us. But I erred in withholding confidence from the husband, and in giving it to the wife——"

"To Gertrude?"

"To your wife. Her pity, her sympathy, comforted me beyond expression; poured oil into my wounds. Nevertheless, I erred—I deeply erred in seeking it."

"But the books—the miniature?" asked Nugent impatiently.

"They were relics of the past, the property of my wife, retained by Winthrop in case some day there might be difficulty in proving who Edward was. Winthrop gave them in charge to Lucy."

Nugent suddenly drew from his breast-pocket the packet of letters found in the parcel, which he had not yet unsealed.

"These," he exclaimed, "were in the parcel! I thought they were addressed to Gertrude. I have not yet had courage to read them!"

"Read, Nugent, read! You will see that they corroborate my story."

Nugent broke the seals, and within another enclosure also sealed were several letters written on foreign paper. The ink was faded to a yellow tint. The dates and post-marks were old. The address on each letter "La Signora Clinton."

Nugent's firmness almost gave way. The revulsion of feeling was great. Yet the suddenness of the surprise confused and perplexed him. He felt as one who awakes from a dream in the dead of night, and cannot call to mind in what place he is.

Strange to say, at the first moment there was almost as much pain as joy. He had committed a great wrong—inflicted a cruel injury. How much must she have suffered—how much must she be at that moment suffering!

Mechanically he rose, and, accepting Clinton's arm,

hastened towards the town. He would start for London by the first train. But, unfortunately, being Sunday, there was none till next morning. Then he must send a telegraphic message.

They hastened towards the telegraph office, conversing as they went on the subject that filled their minds.

Lovell that morning, in pursuance of the plan of operations laid down the night before, had gone to another church on the chance of meeting either Nugent or Edward. He had returned to the hotel, and was beginning to feel anxious at Clinton's prolonged absence, when the waiter threw open the sitting-room door, and Clinton entered, pale and exhausted by all he had gone through.

He asked for wine and water, and then related what had passed.

Nugent, after despatching the telegraphic message, had hastened back to his lodgings to see Edward. It was indispensable that the lad should be fully prepared for meeting his father. There was much to be explained. Clinton consented, therefore, not to go to the lodging until the evening. In fact, Lovell would have prevailed on him to put off the interview until next day. But to this Clinton could not be brought to submit.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

IN the front parlour of Nugent's lodgings close to the quay at Avonsbury, two figures are seated on a sofa side by side. Their hands are locked in silent and affectionate sympathy.

The grey shadows of a summer's evening have already descended on the multitudinous streets and spacious squares of Avonsbury, wrapped its courts and alleys in a deeper gloom, and veiled from sight all but the more prominent outlines of the shipping on the river.

Here and there, from the deck or cabin of vessels lying sleepily on those leaden waters, flared a ruddy quivering light, studding the more distant darkness like sparks of fire. Streets and quays were quieter than usual even on a Sunday evening. A soft but heavy rain was falling from the undefined masses of cloud that sloped down from above till they seemed to rest on the very roofs of the houses, and few but citizens bent on keeping some special appointment cared to venture forth. Through the haze of streaming rain, the gas-lamps in the streets gave a blurred, dis-

torted light. The pavement immediately beneath, flooded with the pouring rain, shone with a watery glare.

In the room where these two figures are seated, all is now wrapped in obscurity. You cannot precisely distinguish who they are.

Is it Sir Reginald and Edward? Is it the father and his newly-recovered son? Are they sitting there, hand grasping hand, tasting in silence the happiness of a relationship never realized till now? No. One indeed is Edward, but the other is Nugent. Yet it is now more than an hour since Sir Reginald, accompanied by Lovell, entered the house—since he approached his son, and held out his arms to fold him to his heart. It is more than an hour since then. Why are they not together?

To explain this, we must listen to the conversation of Sir Reginald Clinton and Lovell in the drawing-room of the same house.

“It is a trial, Sir Reginald!” exclaims Lovell—“a severe trial! But you must give him time. You must, indeed. Recollect all that has passed. He is taken by surprise, perplexed, bewildered. *You* have been looking for him, but *he* has not been looking for you. He cannot realize what it is to have a father. Every thing is strange to him. Give him time, Sir Reginald—give him time. Let the idea work in his mind a little. Perhaps, after all, nature will speak out.”

“Lovell!” rejoined Clinton—“Lovell, he shrank from me with horror. He clung to Nugent as to his good angel, and recoiled from me as from an evil spirit. Coldness, indifference, distrust, I could have borne; but this loathing—this terror—shocks and unmans me. It seems, as I look into his dark scornful eyes, that the soul of his dead mother confronts me, and sets me once more at defiance. It is horrible—too horrible! Ever since I grew weary and sick of the vanity and the rottenness of earthly joys—ever since my heart felt a touch of sorrow for past iniquity, and yearned for pardon and for peace, I have striven—honestly and earnestly striven—to find my son, and clasp him to my heart, and do him justice in the face of heaven and of man. And now—now when at length I have found him, he loathes me, he spurns me, he rushes into the arms of a mere chance protector, and flees from a father ready to embrace him with tears of gratitude and joy!”

“Recollect,” Lovell gently interposed, “he owes much to Nugent—recollect the misery and degradation from which he rescued him—recollect all he has done for him since!”

“Truly,” continued Clinton, unheeding the interruption—“truly, when I call to mind the hatred stamped on every feature of his face, and the vehement fury with which he clenched that right hand of his and shook it almost in my face; if a dagger had been within his

reach, he would have plunged it into his father's heart!"

Clinton threw himself on a sofa, and for some minutes was a prey to the keenest distress.

Soon, however, Clinton rose, and taking Lovell's arm said in composed, almost gentle, accents—

"My friend, bear with me. Why should I fret and fume, as if peace and happiness were mine by indisputable right? I will be patient. I will give the poor lad time. And now, Lovell, once more accept my thanks for all your kindness—your great and constant kindness. I shall never forget it, wherever my future lot may be cast!"

And so they parted for the night.

Meantime, Nugent sat up with Edward, honestly endeavouring to reason him into a right state of feeling towards his father—but in vain.

The lad's countenance expressed only impatience and disgust. He said little, except now and then a few words of bitterness, such as—"Why should I love him? What has he ever done for me? What has he done for my mother? Where is she? Why did he drive her to leave him? Why did he suffer her to wander forth into the world alone? He has never been a father to me. I do not love him at all. I only love you. I hope I may never see him again!"

Edward's excitement made Nugent uneasy, and, instead of retiring to rest, he lay down on a sofa in his bed-room, and made the lad occupy his own bed.

From Edward's constant change of posture, and occasional whispered exclamations and sighs, Nugent gathered that he, too, was little disposed for slumber. Nevertheless, towards morning, Nugent fell asleep, and did not wake till it was light. To his surprise, he perceived Edward dressed, and sitting at the table writing. So soon as the latter saw he was awake, he rose, and, leaving the table, sat down on the sofa by his side.

A great change had passed over Edward's countenance. It wore a quiet expression, and his voice was gentle and subdued.

He took Nugent's hand, and said simply—

“I am writing to him.”

Nugent looked at him inquiringly.

“Do not you know whom I mean? My father.”

And, as he uttered the words, his eyes filled with tears.

He continued—

“I am asking him to forgive me for my sin and my folly yesterday. I've slept none all night, thinking and thinking. I am very sorry. I see every thing different now.”

Nugent rose up, and, seizing his hand, exclaimed—

“Come to him, Edward; come to him at once!”

“Will he forgive me?”

“Forgive you? You cannot tell what joy you will cause him!”

“And will *you* forgive me?” asked Edward. “I mean, will you care for me as before, and let me love you as well as my father?”

“Edward, do not doubt me. Trust in the sincerity of my friendship. What I am now, that I shall always be. But, come.”

Passing his arm round the lad's waist, Nugent drew him up-stairs to the drawing-room.

Sir Reginald had come down a few minutes before, and stood opposite the fireplace, leaning with his elbow on the mantelpiece. He did not hear them enter, but as they approached he started and turned.

The father and son looked at one another for an instant, and then, with tears, clasped each other to the heart.

Nugent quietly withdrew to the room below, and, writing a short note to Sir Reginald, left it in charge of the servant. Then, summoning Lovell to accompany him, he hastened to the railway station to catch the first train for London.

About mid-day there was a loud ring of the front-door bell at Lady Maud's house in Grosvenor-street. Whereupon, Mrs. Grierson, who had been chatting with Lady Maud and the young ladies on various topics, just to pass the time—for the telegraphic message had duly arrived, and Nugent was hourly expected—sprang from her chair, and exclaimed—“There he is!”

The other ladies also rose and looked at each other with some excitement of manner. But Mrs. Grierson, who being a surgeon's lady thought it her duty to exhibit cool presence of mind and a sound judgment, left

the room, trembling all over, and exclaiming, with a palsied shake of the head meant for a gesture of stern decision—

“I must run down and stop him, or he will be rushing up-stairs to see Gertrude!”

Now, it so happened that Mr. Grierson was at that moment paying a little visit to Gertrude, to keep her mind occupied; for she too was, as may be supposed, in a flutter of expectation, although, for fear of overmuch excitement, the happier aspect of affairs was only gradually revealed to her. The moment, then, that Mr. Grierson heard the bell, he extricated himself from the easy-chair in which he had been reclining, and stepping to the bedside, felt Gertrude’s pulse, and looking in her face, said, with surprising hilarity of manner—

“Now, Mrs. Nugent, remember all I have been saying to you. Will you be a hard-headed, sensible woman, without hysterics or any of that nonsense, if I allow Nugent to see you? Eh, Mrs. Nugent?”

Gertrude smiled assent, and the doctor vanished.

Meantime, a subdued altercation was going on in the passage below between Nugent and Mrs. Grierson.

The ladies in the drawing-room stood in the doorway to listen, and made lively though *sotto voce* comments.

“Dear sir,” exclaimed Mrs. Grierson, in a voice meant to be solemn but fast verging on the hysterical, “it is a dangerous experiment. My heart bleeds to cause you this disappointment. But you *must* not see her! As

a surgeon's wife, I have experience. I feel deeply for you. My heart——"

"But," remonstrated Nugent, "I will only say one word—I will not stay two minutes in the room——"

"My heart bleeds for you, dear Mr. Nugent ; it does indeed ! But I cannot permit it. As a surgeon's wife, I cannot. Any message, dear Mr. Nugent," continued Mrs. Grierson, with her eyes full of tears—"any message I will convey, but see her you must not, you cannot——"

"Pooh, nonsense !" exclaimed a good-humoured voice from above. "Come up, Mr. Nugent, directly. Your good lady is expecting you."

And Mr. Grierson's face peered down through the banisters of the stairs over their heads, smiling as if he had perpetrated some excellent practical joke, and was watching the results of it.

"Don't stay more than a quarter of an hour," he added, as Nugent sprang past him. Then, turning to his wife, "'Twill do her a world of good, my dear ! She will be down-stairs in three days ; you see if she is not. And, now, you come into the dining-room along with me, and have a glass of wine, or you will be off in hysterics, or some such folly. Come along, now !"

And the good-natured surgeon drew his wife's arm in his, and carried her off to the dining-room.

The ladies up-stairs highly applauded Mr. Grierson's decision in favour of Nugent, and Jessie and Agatha

were laughing over Mrs. Grierson's discomfiture, when the former suddenly exclaimed—"Why, Aggie, you have laughed till you are perfectly crimson. One would think you were blushing!"

Possibly it was not entirely the laughter that made Agatha blush, for her eyes were fixed on some one at that moment entering the room; namely, the Rev. Walter Lovell. Jessie found herself, she hardly knew how, gently wafted out of the room in company with Lady Maud, and her sister and Lovell were left together.

By this time, Nugent was kneeling by Gertrude's bedside, covering her pale hands with kisses, and begging her to forgive him, and to try to love him once more. Whilst she, drawing his face towards hers, assured him she had never loved him so much as she did at that moment.

For certain it is that few are aware of the strength of their love until those they love are taken away from them. Often, indeed, where no particular attachment appears to exist, sudden separation lifts the veil which concealed it. Husband and wife may have lived a life comparatively loveless and comfortless, yet, when death divides them, the heart of the survivor is oftentimes smitten with an agony of sorrow.

All the past unfolds itself with ruthless accuracy; the repeated provocation, the persistent injustice, the sluggish apathy, the petty cruelty, kindness abused, confidence betrayed, yearnings of compassion repressed and stifled,

sympathy that was watched for and prayed for and would have been welcome as rain to the parched herbage of summer, coldly and contemptuously denied—all slowly reveals itself. Veil after veil is lifted—cloud after cloud rolls away—visions of early happiness for ever lost—dreams of what might have been, but now can never be—gather round the mourner's spirit, and add the pangs of bitter compunction to the loneliness and desolation enveloping him.

Something of this nature often occurs in separations less decisive and impassable than that of death; for even in brief separations the mind acquires a clearer perception and a sounder judgment. Memory is more busily at work, and the conscience makes itself better heard. It is a faint foreshadowing of the thoughts and feelings evoked by that greater severance which must sooner or later come. And thus had these two, Nugent and his young wife, in the long hours of dreary and miserable disunion, profited by the bitterness of thoughts and recollections which beset them on every side, and steeped their hearts in affliction and remorse. What would I now give not to have uttered that bitter word? What would I now give to have repressed that cruel glance of indifference, that gesture of anger or contempt? What would I give to have spoken that word in due season—to have followed a just and charitable course—to have evinced more sympathy, more patience—to have honestly, persever-

ingly striven, as in the sight of my Maker and my Judge, to do what was best, what was kindest, what was wisest, by my companion, my deliberately-chosen companion, along the journey of this mortal life? Well is it for those who take these things to heart betimes, ere the last page of life's varied history be turned over and the book for ever closed! Thus, then, it happened with these two, and in after years they looked back with a sort of religious thankfulness upon this passage of their earlier wedded life, from whence dated that entire communion of heart and mind they subsequently enjoyed.

A few months elapsed before the Manor-house farm was again occupied. The Nugents accompanied Lady Maud and her daughters in a tour on the continent. They were joined by Lovell, who certainly had every right to be one of the party, for his marriage with Agatha Usherwood was only deferred until a little longer time should elapse from the date of her father's decease. The following Christmas, however, saw both the Rectory and Manor-house at Okenham once more occupied, to the hearty satisfaction of the parishioners, both old and young. The marriage ceremony between Lovell and Agatha was performed at Okenham church by our friend Mr. Hobner, who, by one of those accidental freaks of poetic justice committed at long intervals by the patrons of livings, had been rewarded for his long and arduous labours as an underpaid curate, by the living of Salt-

marsh, vacated with much reluctance by the aged incumbent at the stern summons of death.

That the Lovells lived happily, we think the reader will conclude without the aid of any assurance from ourselves.

The rectory and the manor farm at Okenham became indeed homes happy in themselves, and the source of happiness to many humbler homes scattered along the village road, or studding the hill-side under the shadow of elm and poplar.

Before we take leave of the Manor-house, it will be right to mention that Mrs. Finchley was not again installed in the situation of housekeeper. A comfortable cottage in a sunny spot was appropriated to her use. Here she passed the remainder of her days in feeding and rearing poultry, distributing tracts amongst the villagers, and reading an ancient Bible that had belonged to the Nugents in the reign of Queen Anne. Although she had not been on the happiest terms with her young mistress whilst occupying the post of housekeeper, the case was very different now. Many were the visits Gertrude paid her, sometimes to talk over the wants or vicissitudes of the poorer villagers, sometimes to discuss poultry-rearing and dairy operations—for Gertrude was becoming an adept in these matters—sometimes to have a chat on things in general.

Nugent himself, as time went on, was enabled to repurchase several additional pieces of land originally belonging to his ancestors. From whence we gather

that his affairs are tolerably prosperous, and that the sunburnt sturdy little urchin, who, clutching hold of the plain gold cross hanging round Gertrude's neck, declares he will not give it up till he is allowed to kiss the baby lying asleep in her lap, will not improbably inherit a property equal in extent to that possessed by his forefathers in the days of the Star-chamber.

Lucy Winthrop and her brother, as soon as the latter's health permitted, made preparations for emigrating to Australia, but had not made much progress when they were somewhat embarrassed by the energetic declaration of Mr. Crowder, of the Okenham general shop, that he would and should accompany the party, if only in the capacity of a shoe-black. This little difficulty was, however, amicably compromised through the intervention of Lovell, who, one fine Sunday morning, published the bans of marriage between Lucy Winthrop and Jonathan Crowder, and having done so the requisite number of times, finished by duly marrying them in Okenham parish church, to the satisfaction of all concerned. In deference to Nugent's advice, Mr. and Mrs. Crowder and Winthrop did not after all go so far as Australia, but emigrated to Ireland instead, where they rented a large farm, and managed to thrive upon it. Lucy once a year visited her former mistress, but her brother never stirred from their new home, but devoted himself to the farming business with

an energy which greatly promoted the success of the undertaking.

Dr. Crayfoot's history was melancholy. Shortly after the Clawthorp asylum changed hands, the doctor exhibited unmistakable symptoms of mental derangement. The money promised to him by Mr. Nutt, and faithfully paid by Clinton, would have sufficed to keep him for some time in a respectable private asylum, but this money had wholly disappeared. Suspicion fell upon a woman named Sharker, who vanished much about the same time; but there was no certain proof forthcoming against her, and it was not deemed worth while to pursue the matter further. It ended, therefore, in the doctor's admission into the Swampshire county lunatic asylum as a pauper patient. Some of our readers may not think that the doctor received his due deserts in being consigned to so clean and comfortable an establishment. But if they were to see him in the ordinary patient's costume, with a shaved head, begging every visitor in a whining voice for a pinch of snuff, and remarked the expression of his countenance, we think on the whole they would be satisfied.

Lady Maud, after Agatha's marriage, resided for a couple of years at Paris with her daughter Jessie. Here an Austrian general, with a face strongly resembling a yellow poodle-dog's, made violent love to her, and slightly wounded a personal friend, who pretended to be a rival, in a sham duel. Whereupon Lady Maud, thinking his

duplicity, which she clearly saw through, a symptom of genuine passion, gave him her hand. We fear her ladyship was not entirely happy in her marriage, for it is a fact that she and her husband were shortly afterwards parted through the agency of the Austrian law of divorce. She still, however, resides on the continent, and is much courted by the leading fashionables of Vienna; although rumour has it, that, being secretly in the pay of the Austrian government, whom she provides with much useful intelligence, the *ci-devant* Lady Maud is more feared than loved, and in the event of any popular outbreak would have to fly for her life.

Jessie became finally the wife of a thriving barrister on the northern circuit, remarkable for his *sang-froid* and imperturbable power of face, namely, Mr. Edgar Clair.

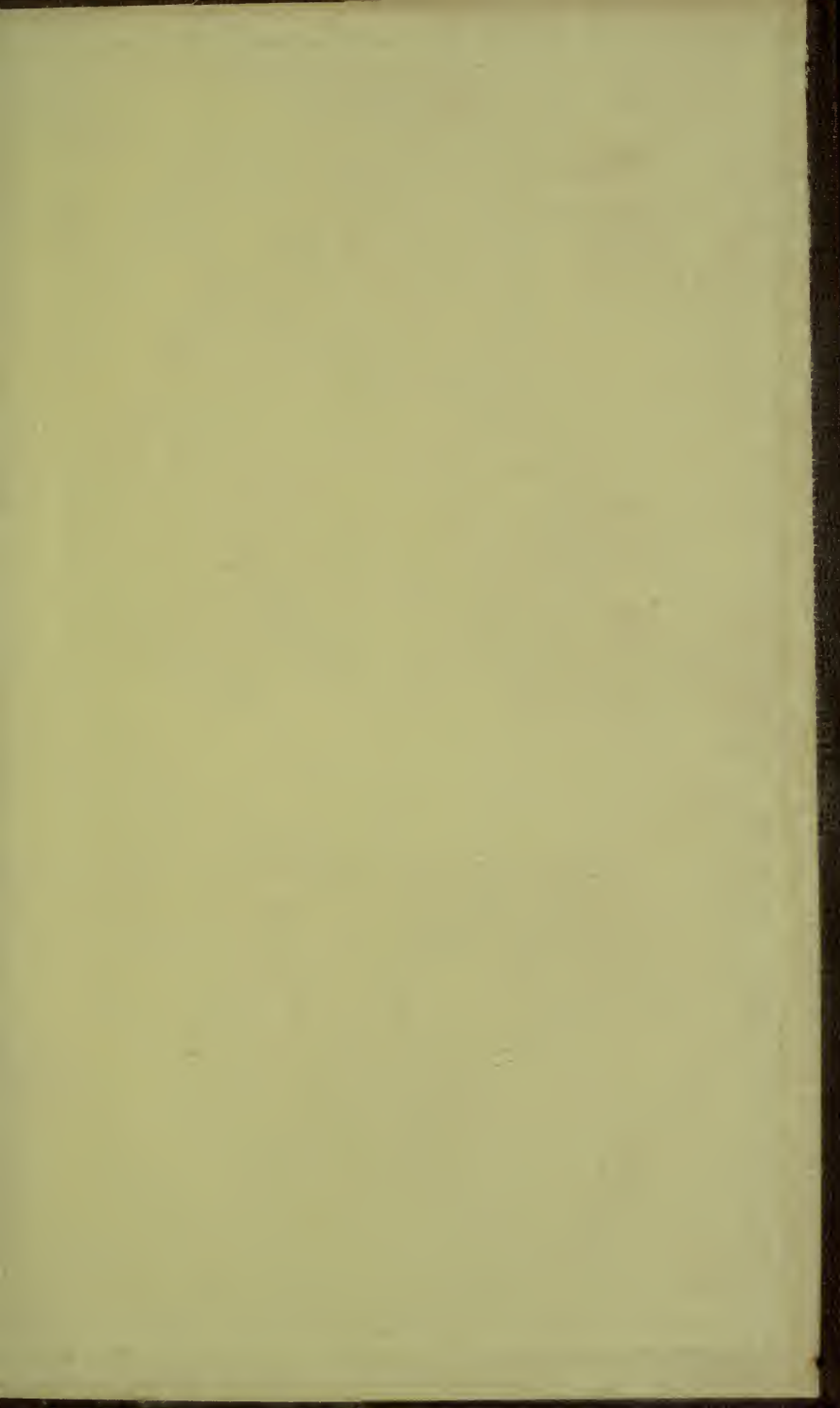
Not much has transpired relative to Sir Reginald Clinton and his son. It is believed that they passed several years abroad, travelling on the continent as well as in America and in the East. Sir Reginald's costly mansion in town is let on lease. His estates in England are for the most part administered by Nugent, who is allowed a large latitude in the expenditure of a portion of rent in works of charity as well as agricultural improvements on a large scale. Sir Reginald at present resides at his place in North Wales. Latterly, a handsome dark-looking young man has paid periodical visits at the Manor-house, and it is rumoured that this

is Edward Clinton, although his composed and indeed serious demeanour shows little trace of the early impetuosity of his character.

And now, in bidding our readers farewell, we would disclaim any wish to paint our fellow-countrymen in unfavourable colours.

Doubtless, below the surface of English society, beneath the varnish of civilisation and the rosy hues of seeming prosperity, lurk dark and noxious evils. This is, however, not so much because we are English, but because we are human. And, to lay bare those evils with an unflinching hand, is the first step to mitigate and to cure them.

THE END.



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